

A Study of Social Realism in the Select Indian Dalit Autobiographies

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English,
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Doctor of Philosophy in English

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "A Study of Social Realism in the Select Indian Dalit Autobiographies," is submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. It has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree.



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Abstract

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Scope and Method of Study: The research entitled "A Study of Social Realism in the Select Indian Dalit Autobiographies," analyses the portrayal of the secluded Dalits' socio-economic-political exploitations and developments through the autobiographies of Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and K.A. Gunasekaran. As a creative literary force, Dalit writings chronicles the lives of the untouchables, who have been deprived of identity, and equality.

Findings and Conclusion: The select authors penned their soul-numbing survival stories parallel to American slave narratives. They documented sufferings "as it is" - the reality. The caste system is depicted as "mimics" in their autobiographies. Dalits, the caste victims, emerge out of social and legal exploitations, yet they are still undervalued and denied of socialisations. The devastated "selves" consider their autobiographies as "agents" to bring out positive transition beyond borders in the contemporary Indian Dalits lives.

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List of Abbreviations/Acronyms

GUI	: <i>Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography</i>
JUL	: <i>Joothan: An Untouchable's Life</i>
OKA	: <i>Ooru Keri: An Autobiography</i>
PWB	: <i>The Prisons We Broke</i>
AIR	: All India Radio
AISCSF	: All-India Scheduled Caste Student Federation
DSS	: Dalit Sangarsha Samhiti
HRW	: Human Rights Watch
INC	: Indian National Congress
MLA	: Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	: Member of Parliament
NSS	: National Service Scheme
RSS	: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SC/ST	: Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
SSD	: Samata Sainik Dal
SSLC	: Secondary School Leaving Certificate
VCK	: Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi
VAO	: Village Administrative Officer

Chapter I

Introduction

Dalit literature is creative and intellectual literary expression which transforms the social realities into various literary genres. It is a recent offshoot of Indian literature and represents an emerging trend in the Indian literary scene. Dalit Literature is primarily a social and human document, which deals with the people who had been socially and economically exploited in India for hundreds of years.

The Aryans invaded the India and implemented the new law of "varna" to protect from miscegenation particularly the indigenous aborigines. Ancient (2000-500 BCE), Medieval (600 CE to 1200 CE), and Early Modern India (1500s) excommunicate untouchables from Hinduism. Several invaded administration did not consider the welfare of indigenous – untouchables. The untouchables are referred as "Chandala," or "Avarna" (by the Hindu sacred book Veda), "Untouchable," or "Harijans," (used by Narasimha Mehta and Mahatma Gandhi), and "Exterior Castes" by the famous historian J.H.Hutton.

The British Indian Empire gave some reform schemes to the historically disadvantaged men and women. In 1935, the Government passed the "Government of India Act 1935," and identified the untouchables as – Depressed Class or the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST). The act also

provided some welfare schemes to bring out development of Dalits. Eventhough Dalits were considered as impure and unskilled, they began to articulate their dignity and identity in speeches and writings. Foreign writers, non-Dalits, and Dalits were aware of the impact of caste system in South Asia. They produced research articles, poems, drama, short stories, novels, and other forms of mass media about the exploited social life.

African American Literature created advancing wavefront in the United States of America during the twentieth century as a voice of protest against racial discrimination. Similarly, Dalit literature also documents the socio-cultural-political factors of the exploited mass in India. African Americans were prevented from enjoying life because of their race. The Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s-1930s institutionalised the African American literature as a subject of academic inquiry and ensured that the writers and their readers were keenly aware of the circumstances in which they worked. Whether the writers embraced the tradition or resisted its premises, their work extended its contours. *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature* says:

...the first two centuries of the African diaspora's sojourn in the U.S. were marked by the dominance of the SLAVE NARRATIVE and African American FOLKLORE, both of which continued to

flourish and influence African American literature and politics long after the end of slavery. This does not mean, however, that these two creative forms represented the totality of African American literature. (15)

Harlem Renaissance was initially started as the "New Negro Movement." It created great space for a new Negro culture and music like Jazz, and Blues. It was characterised by an overt racial pride that came to be represented in the idea of the "New Negro." Through intellectual writings and creative arts, Negro promoted progressive or social equality in America.

Most of the Negro slaves did not even know their biological parents and the date of birth because of illiteracy and blacks as commodity in slave trade. They were not even allowed to read or learn. But blacks orally reported their deprived past through speeches, and consequently edited them in the "creative forms" – autobiography and folklore. Negro slaves narrated, in their autobiographies, the horrors of family separation, the sexual abuse, and the inhuman treatments. These experienced narrations helped the Abolitionists to educate both Black and White people beyond the borders. The Black Panther Movement was started for the upliftment of black people as a legal welfare measure in America.

After a few decades, Dalit Panther Movement followed the Negroes' and got its intellectual recognition in the life period of Babasaheb Dr.B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956). He was the first untouchable educated in the United States of America, and England. After India's independence (1947), the idea of democracy reached many sections, awakening the masses all over the country, including Dalits and Tribes. Indian literature expressed these sentiments, and the Dalit literature also portrayed their society in their regional languages. Besides, Indian literature in regional language, and Indian Literature in English (ILE), and Dalit Writings in translation is another groundbreaking development in the pre and post-colonial translations from the various languages, particularly in English. There was revolutionary transformation in the lives of the Dalits due to translation in various national and world languages. As J.C. Catford in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, says:

It is generally agreed that *meaning* is important in translation particularly in total translation. Indeed, translation has often been defined with reference to meaning; a translation is said to "have the same meaning" as the original. (35)

As Bisho A.C. Lal says, in his opening address at the Dalit Solidarity Conference, Nagpur, "The word 'Dalit' is a beautiful word, because it embraces the sufferings,

frustrations, expectations, and groaning of the entire cosmos"(xiii). Dalit literature, for its expression, is an integral part of the Dalit movement as it utilises different forms, styles, and content.

Munshi Premchand, Amrita Lal Nagar, Mannu Bhandari, Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Malkhan Singh, Jai Prakash Kardam, Suraj Pal Chauhan, Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, and other writers brought out social purpose and criticism rather than mere entertainment in their writings. It should be viewed with its contemporary context, as it is not a "recreational" or "leisure" literature because it advocates rights of the Dalit community and inspires people to rise against oppression. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, in her introduction to *Joothan*, says, "Autobiography has been a favorite genre of Dalit writers" (xxxv). Since autobiography is an asset and is matter of life study for other human beings, Dalits themselves merge with the autobiographies.

Dalit autobiographies differ from other types in expression and purpose. They portray Dalits' devaluations, and serve as an "intellectual propaganda" for creating socio economic and political awareness. Karnata Dalit writer Malagatti says, in "Introduction" to his autobiography *Government-Brahmana*: "We are choosing memories that create social change"(x). The main purpose of the Dalit autobiographies is to record the suffering and humiliation of

the Dalits as a whole. It helps in the emancipation of the oppressed and exploited people.

Dalit autobiographer are concerned with the pathetic condition of the Dalits. They help fellow Dalits to be alert and struggle for their rights, which are denied to them by the so-called upper castes. As memories, Dalit autobiographies are sources of Dalits' social reality in contemporary India. Textually, these works deal with the socio-economic and political status of Dalits. These autobiographers picture contemporary authentic conditions of the underprivileged and offer dramatic accounts of poverty and survival in general. They are deprived of economic power and social welfare. Yet they get some benefits by Reservation Policy. However, they are forced to stay out of the welfare schemes. These kind of social and legal injustices are also the themes of the autobiographies.

In 1840s, there were many artists and writers influenced by socialism and working in similar styles, often collectively referred to as "realists." The social conditions that have been prevailing (hence "Social Realism") required every day problems to be considered case by case. Jeff Adams, in his book *Documentary Graphic Novels and Social Realism*, traces the nineteenth-century origins and early twentieth-century applications which are developed using the concept of a critical, social realism:

This modeled on the theories of art historians such as T.J. Clark, Linda Nochlin, and the political writings of Bertold Brecht and Georg Lukacs on Marxist-based concepts of realism developed in the inter-war years of the 1930s. They all share concepts of realism that can be defined primarily as political and critical practices that analyse social conditions, and it is these conditions that underpin the cultural events represented in artworks, and graphic novel....Realism is most commonly used in studies of Western literature of the nineteenth century to describe the practice of authors like Stendhal, Emile Zola and Gustave Flaubert in nineteenth-century France. These analytical, politically-astute authors often referred to the contradictory rituals of class in contemporary society, and through a combination of melodrama and documentary established literary forms that may still be recognised in graphic novel narratives. (25-27)

Realism in art and literature is an endeavor to portray life "as it is," particularly the social crises of Negro slavery, and Hiroshima and Nagasaki Atomic bomb impacts. Jeff Adams assures.

Similarly, Dalit writers insist on the importance of social conditions and record case by case what they see "as it existed," in a dispassionate manner. The authors show life with reality, omitting nothing that is "ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing." The approach "social realism," is employed in the research to bring out the authors' commitment in drafting the social behaviour of upper caste people against Dalits in the contemporary India. To the realists, the writer's most important function is to describe as truthfully as possible what is observed through the senses. It is concerned with appropriateness of social crises which are depicted as "mimesis" in literature, particularly autobiographies.

Documenting social realities was an overwhelming theme in black narratives and also in Dalit autobiographies. In working so, the Black and Dalit writers felt to be *of* as well as *for* the exploited and deprived mass. Margaret Walker points out the "1930s" as the decade in which "the New Negro Came of Age." (qtd. in Stacy I Morgan's *Rethinking Social Realism: African American Art and Literature* 4). Her thoughts on the new consciousness may be juxtaposed with Dalit literature. Writers began to emphasis on the democratic consciousness and expected social changes. African American writers considered themselves as "agents" to leverage transformation in the social and political sphere on behalf

of African American community. Their literature began to call attention to the threat of both race prejudice and class inequalities. They did not write for the entertainment of white communities. As W.E.B. Du Bois declared, "most whites wanted Negroes to amuse; they demand caricature;...(qtd. in Morgan 4).

Dalits' social thinking and writing emerged out of the authors' social stratifications. Dalits are displaced and remain as fugitives due to caste atrocities like burning huts. In observing these events, the Dalit writers felt to be *of* as well as *for*. Their creative writings documented their lives, social and political events which play a key role in the study of literature, and who are sample contemporary documenters of "social crises" or the social reality.

African American people worked menial jobs and wrote their sufferings in America. In India, Omprakash Valmiki tended pigs with bare feet after school hours. Vasant Moon gathered plastic and aluminum garbage in Nagpur streets; Siddalingahia worked as a waiter at the dining tables of marriage-halls; Bama and Gunasekaran weeded in the Naickers and Konars' farmlands. While suffering from poverty, they managed to observe the prevailing caste discrimination on a broader scale around them. As Willar Motley remembers how black aspired for betterment:

Charles Davis worked from eight to eight washing
dished and came home to paint until two or three in
the morning every night without fail. At another
time he was employed as a pick and shovel man the
WPA at the Airport"; Bernard Goss, University of
Iowa graduate, "played in a jazz band hopped bells,
washed dishes, waited on tables at Hall House,
worked in commercial studios, ran a poker game, and
even taught art"; and Charles White has been a
newsboy, delivered groceries for the A & P stores,
washed dishes for Thompson's restaurants, [and]
scrubbed floors at Jack and Jill ice cream parlors,
in addition to work as a cook, valet, and houseboy.
(qtd. in Morgan 4-5)

The social realism that people narrated or documented
were invariably about the rich people of the world like
kings, noble heroes, popes, and bishops. Whereas, the lower
communities portrayed as caricatures rather than as serious
characters. As Conrad Clough says, "Social Realism changed
that however, suddenly people wanted to read and hear stories
about everybody" ("Social Realism: How the Black Death
Changed Art and Literature"). Not just the famous and
powerful, but also the lowly and downtrodden could all be the
subjects of entertaining tales.

Social Realism casts light on the lives of people of social classes that had never really been looked at before. It is a concept that reached fruition in renaissance humanism. It was only in death, however, that lowborn men and nobility were alike. Even such a low person as a grave-digger can be seen to be able to "match wits" on even footing with a prince in one of the most memorable scenes in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This shows a dramatic shift in the way people thought of commoners, but Shakespeare was hardly the first writer to approach the subject.

The upper caste people who have mercilessly been devastating the lives of Dalits and Tribes in India are the critiqued. The desire of authors to document social and political events, and the means by which they might do so, is an enduringly contentious subject. The methods of depiction, sequences of content, and text organisation are analysed to reinforce the Dalit authors' exploration of society. At present, Dalits considered autobiography as a weapon to leverage transformation in the social and political institutions of India.

Writings are essentially expression of the reality of human life and great pieces of literature depicts that reality with communicable lucid language facilitating narrative with readers' aesthetic and literary sense. As

C.T. Indra, in her Introduction to *The Legend of Nandan*, stated:

Although today they are fighting for the restoration of their dignity as human beings, some people belonging to such unprivileged strata have historically believed that it is because of the karma in their previous births that they have been born so. For centuries they have been denied entry into the temple to have *darshan* of the deity. (xvi)

Every phenomenon of people's behavior occurs in the author's social life. An author will responsively convey the social trait or people's behavior which he or she experiences in real life into his or her literary work. In other words, a literary work reflectively brings and provides issue and cultural phenomena or social behavior which happens in the author's real life. As Dr. Johnson said about the feature of autobiography:

The writer of his own life has at least the first qualification of an historian, the knowledge of the truth; and though it may be objected that his temptations to disguise it are equal to his opportunities of knowing it, yet I cannot but think that impartially may be expected with equal confidence from him that relates the passages of

his own life, as from him that delivers the
transaction of author.(qtd. in Prasad 350)

There have been several theories about autobiography and have been assimilated into literary assets. An autobiography is the story of a person's life written by that person who reminisced personal events as objectively as possible. It is the evidence of men's efforts and deeds in life, and in turn, the humanity would learn the art of living from this genre.

The Confessions of St. Augustine by St. Augustine of Hippo, written between AD 397 and AD 398, is the first autobiography. It reflects Augustine's wanton boyhood and spiritual confession towards the union of soul with God. Mohandas K. Gandhi's *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927), Jawaharlal Nehru's *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (1941), and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's *Wings of Fire: An Autobiography* (1999) are remarkable literary assets of Indian Literature. These autobiographies create spiritual and patriotic consciousness towards national development by documenting the life stories of authors. Elleke Boehmer justified (in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*,) the status of Colonial and Postcolonial literature thus:

As in Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936), Kwame Nkrumah's *Autobiography* (1957), or Kenneth Kaunda's *Zambia Shall Be Free* (1962), the life was

offered as an emblem of the nation's coming into being....Reinforced by the personality cults surrounding charismatic leaders in these politically charged times, the homology between personal and national biography could exclude from the idealized nation such groups as women, peasants, untouchables, and already marginalized landless and ethnic communities.(192)

Like African American slave narratives, Dalit narratives are the stories of Dalit victims who endured similar exploitation in their own soil. Dalit autobiographies authentically portray various forms of social and legal injustices. William L. Howarth, in his article, "Some Principles of Autobiography," observes that, "the life, religions, and society" (366) constitute the theme of the autobiography.

Similarly, Dalits use an array of incidents related to injustices as the theme of autobiography in order to educate fellow Dalits, but not to celebrate. There is no fictional theme in Dalit autobiographies, and they do not glorify anything about authors' love and romance. Their autobiographies portray the contemporary India and its freedom struggle as national document "as it was." Dalits narrate serious matters of basic human rights. As Roy Pascal says in *Design and Truth in Autobiography*:

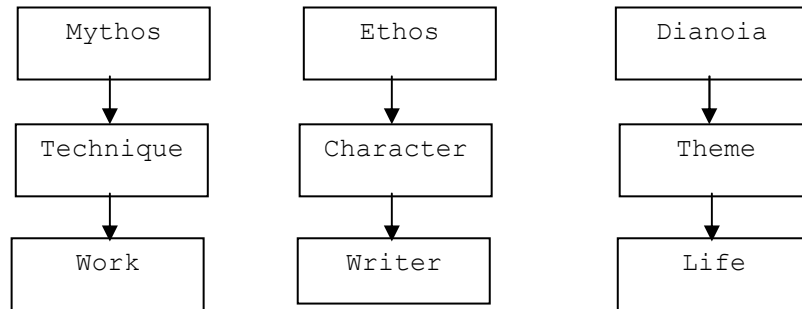
Autobiography depends on the seriousness of the author, the seriousness of his personality and his intention in writings. The self of the author has been deteriorated by the caste system, so that it became an "agent" for the welfare of the exploited.

(60)

Autobiography has Greek etymology that is – *Auto* means *Self*; *Bios* means *Life*; and *Graphe* is *Writings* – *Autobiography*. In the latest book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson briefed the legacy of autobiography as:

British poet and critic Stephen Spender cites the dictionary definition of *autobiography* as the story of one's life written by himself" but notes its inadequacy to the "world that each is to himself." French theorist Philippe Lejeune expanded that definition in a pronouncement many would call definitive, "We call autobiography the retrospective narrative in prose that someone make of his own existence when he puts the principal accent upon his life, especially upon the story of his own personality." (1)

William L. Howarth, in his article "Some Principles of Autobiography," says "the life, religions, and society" constitute the theme of an autobiography:



As William L. Howarth traces the theories of Northrop Frye that, "...three elements; mythos, ethos, and dianoia guide a writer's progress..." (qtd. in Howarth 363-70). *Mythos* refers to the technique, style, image, and structure which constitute the self-portrait of the author. *Ethos* is the factors that the writer's sense of self and place that motivate him to write. *Dianoia* is theme which deals about the "life matters" of the writer which provide sequences of context. Life matters are made up of replica of writer; idea and beliefs, the representation of era; general philosophy, religious faith, or political and cultural attitudes. The inclusiveness of the issues like love, memories, and death attract the readers.

The African Americans survived from the evil practice of slavery, and brought out their sufferings in the form of speech and writings for mass emancipation. There were very significant impacts on Dalit Literature by African American

Literature, and Dalit writers found a “parallel phenomenon” in their movements. It could also be noticed that African American literature stands as support and proof as Dalit literature. These oppressed people’s writings are creative to elevate themselves from the orthodox and conservative societies.

Black Abolitionists made consistent efforts to track down and expose fictitious slave narratives in the abolitionist press. Frederick Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845), Harriet A. Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861), and Booker T. Washington’s *Up from Slavery: An Autobiography* (1901) are the most powerful and authentically crafted slave narratives and literary assets of blacks.

This dissertation, “A Study of Social Realism in the Select Indian Dalit Autobiographies,” is divided into seven chapters. It analyses “dianoia” – the life matters which constitute Dalit autobiographies such as Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan: An Untouchable’s Life* (2003), Vasant Moon’s *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* (2001), Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* (2009), Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* (2003), Bama’s *Karukku* (2000), and K.A. Gunasekaran’s *The Scar* (2009). The autobiographies referred to encapsulate textual accounts of some of the most

fury memories of caste triggered injustices. Dalits' lives are portrayed in broad political and historical contexts. Yet, they predominantly portray subjective humiliation with mass identity. The autobiographies are like "brilliant cut diamond" through which Dalits' socio-cultural-political portrayal is seen "as it is" – the reality.

Joothan: An Untouchable's Life [Joothan] is a famous autobiography of Omprakash Valmiki. In 1993, it was originally published as an essay "Ex Dalit ki Atmakath" in Marathi language in a book *Harijan se Dalit*. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Professor of English, York University, Toronto, translated *Joothan* into English during 1997-2002, with a "foreword" and "Introduction" that help the world readers to understand Dalit literature. *Jootha* means "polluted" food that associated with animals. There are eight chapters in this autobiography. Mukherjee says, "It was speaking of my corner of India, in my first language, Hindi, in a way that no other text had ever spoken to me" (x).

Joothan encapsulates the pain of poverty, humiliation, and the atrocities on Dalits. It portrays the struggle between Chuhra (Dalits) and upper caste Tagas of Barla. Omprakash faced injustices in village, school, and government offices. The Basic Primary School Headmaster Kaliram forced him to sweep the class rooms and playground continuously for three days. Chemistry teacher Brajpal Singh failed Omprakash

in Chemistry Lab experiments and spoiled his education at the Intermediate Level itself.

After abandoning his education, Omprakash got apprenticeship at the Ordnance Factory in Dehra Dun. He felt self-reliance in terms of money but not in the social behaviour of people. In the factory, Commandant Sahib did not allow Omprakash to take a chair, and in the Ordnance Factory Training Institute in Khamaria, the Trainer-in-Charge Mr. Gupta humiliated him after seeing his development in job. Thus, various incidents killed his soul forever.

Omprakash Valmiki is a famous eminent poet, editor, publisher, critic and short story writer. His most acclaimed work is *Joothan* – his autobiography. His other important writings are *Dalit Sahitya ks Saundarya Shastra*, *Ghuspathiye*, and *Salam* (story-collection). Valmiki has been writing regularly for *Vartman Sahitya*, *Samkaalin Janmat*, and *Samyantar*. He has been awarded the Ambedkar Rashtriya Puraskar in 1993. He is also an officer at Opto Electronics Factory, Dehradun.

Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography [*Growing up Untouchable in India*] came out in Marathi as *Vasti* in 1995. Dr. Gail Omvedt, an American and Professor of B. R. Ambedkar Chair on Social Change and Development, has translated *Growing up Untouchable in India* into English in 2001. Currently, she is also a member of the Board of

Trustees of the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (New Delhi) and the National Institute of Dalit Studies (Ahmedabad).

Growing up Untouchable in India has twenty nine chapters with an "Introduction" by Eleanor Zelliot, Laird Bell Professor of History, Emerita Carleton College. She is a contemporary of the Vasant Moon. As a researcher, she also gave her personal experiences of Nagpur during 1960-1970s.

Growing up Untouchable in India portrays Mahars as victims of poverty, caste, and atrocities, social and legal injustices in Nagpur. Vasant Moon's destitute mother Purnabai worked as maid-servant in the houses of Europeans to bring out Vasant and her daughter Malti in the neighbourhoods of Nagpur. Vasant portrays struggles between Mahars (Dalits) and upper castes like, Ladvans, Barkes, Zhade-Ghavaness, Somvashis, Bavanes, and Muslim. His grandfather Sadashiv also worked in Europeans' houses and supported Vasant's family.

Vasant faced social boycott, caste discriminations, and assaults by upper caste people. He aspired for good education, yet he was ill-treated by the upper caste school teachers. With determination, he got M.A. (Marathi) with second class, but the university withdrew it and replaced it with third class. This change in his degree devastated the ambition of Vasant to be a Professor of Marathi.

During 1930s, Ambedkar emerged to voice for Dalits. However, Mahatma Gandhi also worked for the welfare of

Dalits. Dalits were attacked when there was different of opinion between Ambedkar and Gandhi. Similarly, during 1950s, Muslims were killed at the time of the partition of Pakistan. Since boyhood, Vasant associated with Dalit movement Samata Sainik Dal, and understood the importance social welfare. He worked for his people through out his life. He also wrote articles to magazines like, *Janata* and *Shuklendu* (Rising Moon). He worked as a Deputy County Commissioner in 1955, and along with Ambedkar, he embraced Buddhism on 14th October, 1956. *Growing up Untouchable in India* was rich in new glossary and references to Dalit culture.

Vasant Moon was an eminent editor and wrote drama, poetry, and fiction. He was committed to his community and served for it. He was influenced by Wamanrao Godbole, Marx, and Dr. Ambedkar and began to follow them. He edited seventeen volumes of the speeches of Babasaheb Ambedkar. He is also well known for his autobiography.

Vasant Moon was born on 22 January 1932 at Maharpura, Nagpur, Maharashtra. He completed his primary and secondary school education in the Normal School of Nagpur. Despite poverty, he was more careful about his studies. For a few months, he worked as a Deputy Accountant General in Post and Telegraph office before he completed his Master of Arts degree. Vasant's other popular works are *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar*(2002), and *Delusions of Arun Shourie : a futile*

attempt of icon breaking of an iconoclast (1997). On 1 April 2002, he died. As Professor Christopher Queen, reviewing *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*, says:

Vasant Moon's powerful memoir of youth in the slums of central India is by turns disturbing, entertaining, engrossing, and deeply inspiring. Moving beneath Moon's sharply etched tale of material deprivation, caste conflict, and neighborhood politics is the inexorable rise of Dalit (Untouchable) militancy and spirituality... (205).

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* is another groundbreaking autobiography of Dalit woman. Her narratives were serialised in 1982 as *Jina Amucha* in the magazine *Stree*. Maya Pandit, Professor and Teacher-Educator at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, translated *Jina Amucha* from Marathi to English in 1986 with twelve chapters. She also wrote a detailed introduction and an interview of Baby Kamble. Professor Gopal Guru gave a scholarly "Afterword" about the development of Dalit Women and literature.

The Prisons We Broke portrays the struggle of Mahar people with Brahmin and other upper caste men and women in birth state of Maharashtra. Baby Kamble recalled the diabolic mind of upper caste people who have been exploiting Dalits.

The Prisons We Broke gives a realistic picture of the Mahars in Maharashtra. In December 1927, *satyagraha* was observed to establish Dalits' civic rights and expose the tyranny of the upper castes. Baby Kamble recalls the historical social crisis.

Like other Dalit students of the past, Kamble was humiliated, harassed, and discriminated against by not only her classmates but by her teachers also. Their teachers were also in favour of the upper caste students and punished Kamble and her friends when caste Hindu students made complaints against them. Kamble herself is more vocal in the criticism of the educated Dalits who forget their roots and ignore the Dalit cause. She is also very critical about the educated Dalits adopting Hindu ways of life.

As Maxine Berntson stated in the introduction to Marathi version of *Jina Aucha* that, "The customs, rituals, festivals and the Jatras that she describes are indeed a source of unexplored treasure for a sociologist" (qtd. in Maya Pandi's Introduction xiv). *The Prisons We Broke* is the articulation of protest against chauvinism and Hindu hegemony. Kamble describes the physical and psychological atrocities on Mahar women in public and domestic spheres. Their struggles are portrayed as "social agents" for the better transformation in society. AS Nilanjana Bhattacharya, in her review of *The*

Prisons We Broke and *The Wave of My Life: A Dalit Women's Memoirs*, says:

Although both the texts centre on Dalit women and Dalit community, Kamble and Pawar's ways of narrating are quite different. Kamble talks mainly about the suffering of her community, the Ambedkarite movement, the Mahars responding to the call of Ambedkar and the community's participation in the Ambedkarite movement, only occasionally picking up the thread of her own life story; while Pawar focuses on her own life story situating it in the context of the Mahar community of Maharashtra and their struggles during the post-Phule-Ambedkarite period. (2)

Baby Kamble is an activist and writer. She mobilised Dalit Women's Organisation. She was a contemporary of Ambedkar and deeply influenced by Ambedkar's ideology. She also runs an ashramashal in Nimbure. She was born in 1929 Veergao, a village in western Maharashtra, in her grandparent's house. Her grandparent worked as butler in European households in the cities around. Since they sent money home each month, their family was somewhat better off than the others around it. Pandhrinath was her father and was a contractor in profession. He earned and helped fellow people.

Though Baby Kamble dropped her study after fourth standard, she was a victim the evil practice of "child-marriage." She recorded her life experiences in scrap papers and kept them in her petty shop. An America-born researcher and sociologist, Maxine Berntson visited the Dalit settlement Phaltan in 1982. She accidentally met Baby Kamble in her slum. Maxine Berntson collected Kamble's writings and she also took efforts to serialise them as *Jina Amucha*(1982) in the women magazine *Stree*, and its English translation *The Prisons We Broke* came out in 1986. It is the relic of Dalit women oppression. She also faced atrocities from her husband Kondiba Kamble.

Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* is almost reminiscent of distorting the hunger and humiliations of Dalits in Karnataka. It came out as an article in the Kannada magazine *Rujuvatu*, and the English translation by Dr. D.R. Nagaraj [editor and critic] came out in the magazine section of *Deccan Herald* during 1995. With five parts of nostalgic memories, *Ooru Keri* was again translated by S.R. Ramakrishna [Founder and Editor, *The Music Magazine*] in 2003 and was published as book.

Ooru Keri portrays poverty and anxiety of Dalits in Karnataka state. Siddalingaiah's father Dyavanna was a farm labourer in Magadi. He struggled to bring out Siddalingaiah and his two sisters Shivalingamma and Puttamma.

Siddalingaiah's childhood was submerged into poverty. His family belongs to farm labourers and gets low-income, and sometimes nothing. In spite of his abject poverty, Siddalingaiah attended free night-school. He began to realize self-respect and dignity from his teachers at the school. He reveals the experiences which juxtapose ordinary day-to-day struggles like caste discrimination, poverty, and identity.

Siddalingaiah's determination, creativity, and courage helped him to outwit the brutality of the caste system. *Keri* is the colony where Dalits live; it is geographically separated from the main body of a village; it is set off from the mainstream society. He penned the real social conditions to expose the caste dominated society to the world. It was the leftover that was generally given to Dalit people by the upper class instead of wages. Exploitation of innocent and weaker section had been a common phenomenon in India.

Siddalingaiah's mother worked as a sweeper in a Dalit hostel in Srirampura. Every day, after the boys were served, the leftover was given to the workers. His mother used to take home the mudde and saru (meal). This leftover solved many of Dalits' starvation. As soon as his appetite for food was fulfilled, he began to ponder over the thoughts of Ambedkar. Siddalingaiah joined the Karnataka Association and was elected the Joint Secretary. In this way, his political affairs improved with rationalists. He also published his

poetry in the magazine *Shudra*. He started Dalit Sangharsh Samiti Movement and continued to visit several places in Karnataka. Thus, accounts from autobiographies and narratives provide a deeper insight into the exploitation of Dalits and their emancipation.

Siddalingaiah is a popular Dalit poet, folklorist, and play and writer. He is the founder of Dalit Sangarsha Samhiti (DSS) and former member of the Karnataka Legislative Council. Siddalingaiah is an exemplary public intellectual. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree from Bangalore University. *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* was published in 1996. It has an unique style, sarcasm, and ironic tone in narration. D.R. Nagaraj says in his "Afterword," "The autobiography is used to justify, enlarge and explain the writer's social masquerades. As autobiography that does not break, case pain; and mock itself is nothing more than cheap self-justification" (113). Siddalingaiah is Sakat currently the President of Kannada Book Authority, Bangalore.

Bama's *Karukku* (2000) is the most popular Dalit woman autobiography in Tamil. It is a life-story of a Dalit woman, rather the author herself considers *Karukku* the story of Dalit mass. Lakshmi Holmstrom [Founder-Trustee, South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive] translated *Karukku* into English in 2001 with nine chapters, and gave elaborate introduction to Dalit culture and writings. It won the

Crossword Award in India. In the "Afterword," Bama says that *Karukku* symbolises her "conflicts" and "resolutions" that are like the two sides Palmyra petiole with serrated blade.

Bama was a converted Catholic and found her origin that her discrimination is based on her birth as a Dalit. On the other hand, as a Dalit woman, she struggled in churches, schools, and society. *Karukku* portrays the psychological conflicts of Bama which are caused by caste and religion. It also established Bama as a distinct voice in Dalit literature.

Bama is a famous Dalit writer, activist, and a teacher. She was born in 1958 to a poor, downtrodden family at the remote village of Wathirayiruppu, Puthupatti, in Virudhunagar District, Tamil Nadu. Her father Susairaj was a soldier in the Indian Army and Sebasthiamma was her mother. She got B.Sc.(Maths), and B.Ed at St. Mary's College, Tuthukkudi.

Since 1978, Bama has been a teacher and saw that Dalit children are deprived of proper treatment and leadership opportunities in management-run schools, government-aided and government schools. At first, She worked in a convent school in Aarani and left the convent in 1992. She also worked in the Institute of Development Education, Action, and Studies (IDEAS) in Madurai for a salary of thousand rupees per month.

Bama narrated her bitter experiences from religions, job, and society to Rev.Fr. Mark S.J and Fr.M. jeyaraj. They

encouraged her to write down the tragic memories and she published it as *Karukku* (1992) in Tamil language. The word "Karukku" in the Tamil dialect refers to the serrated edges on the sides of Palmyra leave's petiole serrated blade. It cuts the people who touch the serrated blade.

Bama's novel *Sangati* (Tamil,1994; English,2005), and *Vanmam* (Tamil,2000; English, 2002) portray the Dalit inter-caste conflicts. Her short stories "Venayam," and "Kissubukkaran" (1996) are popular in documenting Dalit culture and identity. She also wrote poems on nature, education, caste, and child labour. Her poem *Amma* is dedicated to Bama's mother with lot of emotions. Her latest novel, *Manushi*, is soon to be published and is hoped to be the second part of *Karukku*.

Bama was influenced by Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, and Ambedkar. She attended the Writers' Meet in Paris. Her works translated into Telugu, Malayalam, French, German, and English. She moves with French people easier than Indian. She has been at the forefront of Dalit literature and aesthetics in Tamil Nadu.

K.A. Gunasekaran's *The Scar* is a modern Dalit autobiography in Tamil language, and was serialised in the magazine *Dalit Murasu* during 2004. Professor V. Kadambari [Ethiraj College for Women, Chennai] translated *Vadu* into English in 2009 with eight chapters. Dalit activist Ravikumar

gave a historically valued introduction to the autobiography. Gunasekaran narrates the familiar tale of caste oppression and prejudice prevalent in the Indian society. The narration unfolds his deep pains and sufferings from his childhood itself. *The Scar* is a graphic and confronting narrative of the life experience of a Paraya - an aboriginal agricultural community and one of the Dalits in Elayankudi village, Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu.

Gunasekaran was well known folk artist, playwright, and activist. He is a popular researcher in the Dalit folk songs of Tamil Nadu. Gunasekaran contributed great service to both Dalits and Tamil language. Gunasekaran was the Director of International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai (2008-2011). He was also committee member of World Classical Tamil Conference (2010), Kovai, Tamil Nadu. Being an artist, he has staged many social-issue through his plays in remote villages in Tamil Nadu and other parts of the world. He has won many state level honours and awards. Currently, he is Professor of Performing Arts, in the University of Pondicherry.

Gunasekaran's major Tamil plays are *Sathiya Sodanai*, *Pavalakkodi* or *Kudumba Vazhakku*, *Ariguri*, *Thodu*, *Maartram* [a play about the eunuchs], *Mazhi*, *Kandan* or *Valli*, *Kanavulagavasi*, *Parayai Pilandhukondu*, *Thottil Thodangi*, and *Bali Adugal*. His autobiography *The Scar* was written in Tamil *Vadu* in 2009. The Tamil word *Vadu* refers to the wounds that

were caused by the caste system. *The Scar* portrays the quest and search for human nature in the caste dominated Indian society. It evokes the mixed culture of Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism.

The contributions of Dalits and non-Dalit writers have been emerging everyday and enrich Dalit literature in recent years. Critics and reviewers have showed interests in the emerging literature. John C.B. Webster, Josiane Racine, Jean-Luc Racine, Dr. Gail Omvedt, Eleanor Zelliot, Christophe Jaffrelot, and others have been making significant contributions on Dalit lives in their recent writings.

There are few critical evaluations of Dalits autobiographers with particular emphasis sociological context – the reality. The autobiographical discourse were taken as source of self, history, and society which matter to Dalits and non-Dalits. Tracing the development of the Dalit Literature, Eleanor Zelliot, in her essay "Dalit-New Cultural Context for an old Marathi Word," states:

While Dalit Literature as a school, a self-conscious movement, is a product of the 1960s. Individual writers from among the Untouchables appear in the fourteenth century and again in the Mahar Movement, which began in the late nineteenth century....The *Bhakti* movement, begun traditionally by Dyaneshwar in the thirteenth century, was joined

by saint-poets from almost all Marathi-speaking castes, including the Mahar poet-Chokhamela...
(qtd. in Maloney 77)

Literally, Dalit literature echoes the agony of the experiences of untouchables. It portrays the caste humiliation, injustice, atrocities, and discriminations perpetrated by the upper caste people. It expresses the political consciousness that focused on the struggle for self-respect and dignity for the community. Gail Omvedt, in her article "Dalit literature in Maharashtra: Literature of Social and Protest and Revolt in Western India," claimed that:

...though Dalit literature as "movement" began only in the late 1960s and early 1970s, one of the most important Dalit writers and a major forerunner of the movement was Anna Bhau Sathe (1920-1968)....He was a writer of diverse forms. His novels and short stories remain avidly read even today, and in fact up to the present no equivalent Dalit novelist has emerged. The sorties tell simple heroic or tragic tales of villages...(78)

John C.B. Webster, a Christian Missionary, says that, "...healing the 'wounded psyche' is the Church's unique and distinctive contribution to the total Dalit struggle for dignity, equality, and justice" (177). Christophe Jaffrelot

suggests that "Not only have their [Dalit's] books attracted a mass audience, but they are profoundly impacting the political landscape" (4). Jaffrelot points out the popular politician Ms. Mayawati. She is a Dalit Chief Minister of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh and the leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). He also says that Dalit literature has helped to bring a new recognition to Dalits' social and political problems.

Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany explored "the untouchables, who number some 150 millions, are among the most subordinated and poorest people in India" (290). Their study also brought out the current social and economic debate on poverty in the global context of recent years. Padmanaban says that the untouchables are struggling to cross basic things. They should strive for "education and spread of knowledge" (121).

Juris Dilevko, Keren Dali, and Glenda Garbutt, in their book *Contemporary World Fiction: A Guide to Literature in Translation*, say that *Joothan* is the autobiography of untouchables in India. The Government prohibited caste related discriminations in 1949, and treated the issues as illegal. *Joothan* explores the degrading reality of Dalits in the contemporary India and the political awakening of B.R. Ambedkar.

In his review, "Joothan: A Dalit's Life," Namit Arora says that "Valmiki's narrative voice brims with a quiet sense of outrage at what he had to endure as a human...it attempts to shame them into introspection. This is the kind of book that becomes the axe for the frozen sea inside us" (2). Eleanor Zelliot, in "Dalit Literature, Language, and Identity," brings out the significance of *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*. She says that its vivid portrayal of Nagpur city "evokes the changes in Mahar community especially in the ideology of Ambedkar and his conversion" (452). Similarly, Lakshmanan, in his article "Out-Caste," says that Moon's autobiography provides insights into the future of the oppressed. He also feels that Moon's autobiography should be translated into Indian and foreign languages. It is a collection of historical endeavors of caste and political rivalries in the central India.

As Janhavi Acharekar stated in his review "Liberation Narrative on the autobiography: Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*" that the autobiography [*The Prisons We Broke*] transcends the boundaries of personal narrative. It also gives sociological, historical and political record. It magnifies Dalit feminist critique, and protests against religions as a whole. Vrushali Nagarale, in her article "Discourse analysis of African-American and Dalit Women's Selected Works/biographies: A Comparative Study," says that

The Prison We Broke talks more about Dalits' blind beliefs and superstitions. Both men and women possessed the evil spirit and considered it as the curse of God and Goddesses.

Reviewing *Ooru Keri*, Vikas Kamat says that Dr. Siddalingiah narrates small incidents of village discriminations in very simple language without adding his anger or prejudice. He also expresses the agony of injustice and the beauty of the simplicity of common Indians. Deepa Ganesh's "From the Fringes," comments on *Ooru Keri* and its dramatic performances on the stage that the emotions of each phase intact. Siddalingahia's wanton childhood memories are reflected in his adulthood development. The autobiographical story gives a sharp portrayal of Individual and community as external force.

A translator and fiction writer K. Srilata, in her review, says that reading Bama's autobiography *Karukku* is an intense experience. She brings out the edges of serrated palmyar that snatches the feelings from blood. *Karukku* remains as a cherished masterpiece of Dalit women writing, and it forces the reader to sit up and pay attention to the texture of the narrator's life, a texture that is startlingly different from that of urban, middle-class, and upper-class life ("A Palmyra Leaf that Sears Us").

Shubashree Desikan's, "The Invisible Boundaries of Caste," tells that *The Scar* exposes the pain of life as a

parayar. Gunasekaran was determined to challenge the caste imperialism but not to be cowed down. His autobiography offers micro pictures of caste domination in Madurai region, Tamil Nadu. The author crosses the invisible caste boundaries in villages. But he is assaulted by upper caste people. "*The Scar* speaks of caste evils but also the well-knit relationship between parayars and Muslims ..."(6).

Most of the writers, researchers, critics, and reviewers considered that Dalit autobiographies are the testimonies of caste oppressions and exploitations in the recent years. *Joothan* is considered as an epic of the Dalits' sufferings that have been narrated with various existing references. Gary Michael Tartakov estimates that *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* deeply troubles the readers with deprivation, pain, and anxieties. *The Prisons We Broke* is considered as the autobiography of Dalit women. *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* is a collection of village and slum life of Dalits. *Karukku* brought out the ill-treatment meted out to Dalits, who changed their religions for better treatment. *The Scar* is totally the resentments of Dalits in India.

This dissertation examines the dramatic accounts of Dalits' social-political experiences in the caste hegemonic society of India. The theme of Dalit autobiographies are the social phenomenon and realities of Dalits. It traces the conditions of the Indian social factors that surround the

Dalits, and their interactions with Dalits. It also explores how Dalits were denied equality and liberty in socio-economic-political institutions.

The select Dalit autobiographies corroborate the conditions of contemporary Dalits in the different Indian States. All the authors depicted their deprived conditions of food, shelter, settlement, and culture within and around the Indian society. Besides, Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama and Gunasekaran could be ranked as the "civil-heroes" of a deprived community. They also gave their traumatic memories of apartheid, abuses, assaults, discriminations, injustices, and atrocities. In the process, the study delineates the socio-economic, traumas, and self-elevation.

Chapter II

Dalits' Socio-Economic Status

The socio-economic condition of Dalits has been the national issue since 1947. Articles 15 and 16 of *The Constitution of India* gave opportunities in jobs, education, and political forums through Reservation Policy. This chapter traces Dalits' socio-economic conditions like living place, malnutrition, occupation, and educational facilities as depicted in the autobiographies of Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and K.A. Gunasekaran.

The autobiographers authentically brought out the poor condition of living place, food, work nature, and educational facilities prevailing for Dalits in contemporary India. In all these autobiographies, the narrators and the majority of Dalit characters are descendants of farm labourers. They do not have land for production – a symbol of wealth. Most of Dalits have remained for centuries as labourers in the lands of the upper caste people. They work only as daily waged servants. They can be best remembered as “Dalits with the Hoe” in the sense of the poet Edwin Markham.

The faith in caste system is primarily responsible for the past and present unchanged social stratification of the Dalits. Their liberation has been a myth due to “Varna”

hierarchy and the concept of purity and pollution of castes by the scriptures of Hindu literature, religion, and culture. Dalits have been inhumanly discriminated by the upper caste people and are unable to annihilate it.

On the one hand, British India had obviously failed to establish a constant redistribution of lands and strengthening economic power in favour of Dalits, but it provided a few basic needs like health, education, sanitation etc., to the Dalits. On the other hand, the Government of India has been making various policies in areas of education and employment that have been exploited too. As Gurung and Michael Kollmair ensured, in their article "Marginality: Concepts and Their Limitations:"

Marginality and poverty are often used as synonyms....In another words, poverty is a state of economic, social and psychological deprivation occurring among people or countries lacking sufficient ownership, control or ownership, control or access to resources...(16)

As the words "marginality and poverty" are treated as synonyms in the context of Dalits, they are also the victims of exploitations. *Joothan* is also a remarkable social document of Chuhre community of Barla village, Muzaffarnagar district in Uttar Pradesh, India. Chuhre people were forced to live in a separate settlement that is exclusive for

Dalits. A man-made high brick wall and a pond segregated upper caste from the Chuhra *basti*, or cluster of shanties. Upper caste men and women of all ages came out and used the edge of the pond as an open-air lavatory, squatting across from the Chuhras' homes in broad daylight with their private parts exposed. There was proper sanitation. But Dalits were not allowed to get drinking water from the wells of the upper caste. In Chuhra *basti*, there were thirty families, without proper water facility and sanitation.

Traditionally, Chuhras were cursed to sweep the roads, clean the cattle barns, get shit off the floor, dispose of dead animals, work in the fields during harvests, carrying death-news and perform other physical labour for all upper caste people, including the Tyagi, and Brahmins. The Tyagis did not address them by name, only called out, "Oe, Chuhre" or "Abey, Chuhre" (2). It was alright to touch cows and stray dogs but touching a Chuhra inflicted instant pollution on the Tyagis. During his boyhood, his entire family worked hard, yet they did not manage to get two decent meals a day, not the least because they often didn't get paid for their labour and instead the labourers were abused.

As far as Dalits' nutrition is concerned, they are far behind than others people in India. They lack awareness in this respect. *Joothan* encapsulates the pain, humiliation, and poverty of Dalits. Omprakash gave a detailed description of

collecting, preserving and eating leftover. His memories of being assigned to guard the drying leftover from crows, chickens, and relishing the dried leftover burn him with renewed pain and humiliation when he became a Government servant. He says, "Both Ambedkar and Gandhi advised untouchables to stop accepting leftover" (xxxi). Ambedkar showed how the upper caste villagers could not tolerate the Dalits' denial of leftover anymore and cunningly, the upper caste people made vengeance by assault and denied earning opportunity in the farms. The rainy season was hellish to the Dalits. Omprakash's colony filled up with pig's excrement and mosquitoes. All the downtrodden people's toes engulfed by ringworm [tinea pedis] – a fungal infection. Omprakash remembers the year 1962, all the homes of his locality were made of clay. Their house began to leak, wall collapsed and roof began to slide. As soon as evening fall every thing became absolutely dark. No electricity facility for the Dalits. As Omprakash Valmiki remembers the settlement:

....The stench was so overpowering that one would choke within a minute. The pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights – this was the environment of my childhood....(JUL 1)

Omprakash's father decided to give education to Omprakash. His father begged Master Har Phool Singh for Omprakash's admission. Later he was given admission in the

Basic Primary School. At the out set, Omprakash was not allowed to sit on the mat and drink water. The teachers gave a place at the last row where he sat helplessly. The children of the Tyagis would tease him by calling "Chuhre Ka" (3) – a pejorative means to state "You son of Chuhras." There are two more untouchable students along with Omprakash who are good in studies and their parents are government employees.

During the examination days, he encountered all sorts of problems. There were no electricity; they studied by the light of a lantern or an oil lamp. Cunningly, a chemistry teacher in the Intermediate Level deliberately failed in chemistry lab as a result Omprakash failed and forced to drop out study, but scored excellent marks in other subjects. Due to poverty, he worked in wood depot to load and unload the woods and continued his school.

Omprakash studied in Patwardhan High School with the help of Atmaram Patil. His dress became tattered, in spite he wore dirty cloths. His master Mr. Khedkar asked rich students to spare him used outfit:

I too have felt inside me the flames of
Ashwatthama's revenge. They keep on purning inside
me to this day. I have struggled for years of my
life, powered by little besides the rice
water...(JUL 27)

The poor Dalits should work in the field of Tagas in the hot sunshine in order to earn food grains for survival. Most of the reapers are the Chuhras and Chamars. They wore cloths scarcely and their daily wages were not given properly; rather, they got whatever Tagas gave including leftovers. In addition to this, Dalit women were assigned to clean the cow-dung. It is more difficult in winters. The stink would make one faint; however, the cleaning work is a free service to upper caste. These are some deprived condition of Dalits. After school hours, Omprakash used to graze the pigs in the afternoon and they were another economic source of his family.

His brother Sukhbir's death brought great economic difficulties in terms of basic needs. Bhabhi (widowed sister-in-law) gave her wedding anklet for Omprakash's sixth standard admission. He joined in Barla Inter College. Sukkhan Singh, Ram Singh, and Chandrapal Varma, and Shravan Kumar Sharma (a Brahmin) became his friends. Omprakash visited their home for study. He became class-monitor after getting first rank in the class. As a gesture of respecting Omprakash's development, his seat was moved from back row to front row. However, the behaviour of some teachers was still unfriendly. As Raj Kumar, in *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*," traced:

....He is pained to see his fellow community members doing the same traditional duties without any protest. By writing his autobiography Vamiki thus renders a great service to his community. Along with his life-story, he also narrates the painful experiences of his country life. It is in this sense that Valmiki's life-story also story of his community. (197)

Even these downtrodden people began to improve, the upper caste people never like the progress. Fauz Singh Tyagi called on Omprakash to sow sugarcane. He refused to work keeping in mind the board examinations in the following days. But there is no help on his side. He was taken to the field. Besides this, he experienced all sorts of problems, no peace, no study hours, no freedom, and no electricity. He captured that memory, "....There was no electricity; we studied by the light of a lantern or an oil-lamp..." (67). Thus, Omprakash brought out the living impressions of his settlement.

In *Growing up Untouchable in India*, Vasant Moon portrays the Dalits' livelihood in which they have been living without proper house, water, electricity, and sanitation. Nagpur is a city in the state of Maharashtra - the largest city in the central India. He remembers that Maharpura settlement; most of houses were old, earthen, and flat-roofed - the birth place of Vasant Moon. March, April, and May are the hottest

month for the western and southern regions of the central India. People unable to endure the heat waves of the sun and many women and children would stay in homes. If it rains there will be an intoxicating smell of earth over the settlement. The flow of sweating stops; and the drains begins to overflow the settlement. In Maharpura the heat and rain brought both trouble and joy to Dalits.

Vasant lived with his grandfather Sadashive who worked in Europeans home from which Vasant inherited the ethics of life, morality and discipline. The domestic violence is common phenomenon in Indian villages. Vasant witnessed the pain of his drunken father. He often mercilessly beat up his mother Purnabai. Consequently, Purnabai sought the help of Parsi households for earning to feed her children. Meanwhile, out of hungriness, Vasant and his sister Malti took a bowl to upper caste neighbourhood. They begged, "Oh, madam, give us a piece of bread." An elderly man suddenly sprung at them and said: "Hey, run or I'll whip your ass!"(22); tragically, the house member insulted them. Vasant came back to home with the pain of hungry and of assault.

Vasant and Malti ate the available food and gulp some cold water from the earthen pot in the darkness. There was no electricity for the entire community. His mother Purnabai worked in Mishibab's house for two rupees and food. From the

rich house, she brought vegetables and *chapatis* to her children:

Eating a little of Grandmother Bhuri's warm *bhakri* and coconut, I gulp down some cold water from the earthen pot. Outside the door, the city's lamp twinkles and burns with a low flame. Electricity has not come to the community....Thinking of the mystery of life, I lie down. Grandmother Bhuri, Mother, and I, we are all like that lamp, dangling in storm and rain, waiting for the next day. Outside is the pattern of the rain. I hardly know when sleep comes. (GUI 32)

Since there was no means for food, Vasant became melancholy and desperate. Vasant collected empty aluminum tube of pasting lotion, plastic, match box labels, and cigarette pockets and he sold them for food. This petty business later was transformed into collecting the caricatures of war and suffering portraits. In his life, hungry remains a pin of perennial stigma. Why should he survive? It is a question for all Dalits. Atmaram Patil meted out the expenses of Vasant's studies. Eleanzor Zellior says in her introduction to the autobiography:

I can testify that Moon's early memories still hold relevance for his life....Dr.Ambedkar himself is more famous than ever, often, considered together

with Nehru and Gandhi as one of the three shapers
of the twentieth century in India. (*GUI* xvii-xviii)

Most of the Mahars worked as cooks in the houses of Europeans. In 1930, Mahars stopped descent base occupation carrying dead animals away. The upper caste people cunningly crushed and ceased Mahars from economic and other social independence. Sasharath Patil helped his people but his life was threatened. His properties were setting fire or "arson" [The general definition of arson means that somebody deliberately or intentionally set fire to a property in order to destroy it, with a criminal intent].

Thus, Vasant Moon got cloths from his classmates. His eagerness to study was supported by his friends. His economic conditions were very low for better life style. As Rajkumar articulated:

Vasant Moon's *Vasti* is an autobiographical narrative of an untouchable by who grown in a slum amidst poverty to became a self-made person and later a responsible leader of the Dalit community in Maharashtra, the homeland of Ambedkar. Being an orphan at an early age, Moon's struggle to become educated must have been an arduous task. But Moon's determination to grow in life not only resulted in his having completed a post-graduate degree, but he also became a civil servant in the Maharashtra

state government. Securing a government job helped Moon realise his aspiration of working among socially disadvantaged groups, particularly Dalits. (193)

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* portrays the residential quarters of the Mahar community at Veergaon in Purandar district of western Maharashtra. In 1918, the British Government took up canal building in this region. Her father Pandharinath lived in Phulton and became a contractor to feed his fellow people.

Early morning, tea with leftover bread from the night before was a feature unique to Kamble's home. For other households there was no morning tea. Whether or not other homes had food depended on the bags of stale bread and fermented curry that the children received as alms in the village. Their mothers would light the fire and put the fermented curry and stale bread together to boil in the earthen pot.

It was 1920s, Baby Kamble described how most houses were plastered with mud and decorated with eternal poverty. At the door was a *keli*, an earthen vessel with a narrow mouth used for storing water, covered with a coconut shell which served also as a container to drink the water. There was also a half-broken and worn out *chul* (hearth) and next to it a couple of *parul* (earthen pots). A wooden spoon and an iron

tawa (griddle), used for roasting the *bhakri* (jowar bread), occupied one corner while a grinding stone was placed in another. Above the *chul* hung the *valani* - the rope on which the skins of dead animals would be dried. Baby Kamble notes the sense of humour of the women in the community referred to homes as their "royal palaces" and to the earthen pots and wooden spoons as "kings" and "queens" (40-41). This is humour, yet an ironic tone of poorer.

In times of food scarcity, the women would appeal their husbands and ask that they gather wild berries at least for the children. Wild berries washed down with water would serve as the meal. Ironically, when there were epidemics among the cattle it meant there was food in the community. Though the bodies of the sickly animals were sometimes rotten, some parts could be retrieved. At other times, the men had to think out strategies to generate food. They were-often on the lookout for unsupervised grazing cattle and would feed some medicine to one of the buffaloes so that it would die in a day or two. They were often ready to bring in the dead animal even before the message of the owner reached their quarters. The women queued up for their share and sometimes if there was not enough firewood to cook the meat, it would be eaten almost raw.

All the people of the Maharwada were illiterate except her Father. Her people in the settlement lived in abject

poverty. They had no electricity, and yet their hearts were full of kindness and love for each other. Only three or four among the houses were in good condition. The rest of the houses were stricken by poverty. The walls were nothing but stones arranged vertically with some mud coating. They were tiny huts really. During the festival time women would polish the mud walls and then the floor of the house with cow dung or buffalo dung.

The Mahar women did indeed check the wood thoroughly and often they said, "Kaki, we have taken out each hair and each thread from the wood, don't worry. Are we mad to pollute your house? You are God's people. Don't we know even this much?" (54). Whenever Mahar women sold fire-wood, the wood were thoroughly checked for Mahar hair and blood which are considered as pollution. The Brahman Kaki constantly admonished:

Listen carefully, you dumb Mahar women, check the stick well. If you overlook any of the threads sticking to the wood, there will be a lot of trouble. But what's that to you? Your carelessness will cost us heavily. Our house will get polluted...that's why I'm telling you, check the sticks well! (PWB 55)

The *yeskar* Mahar [The Mahar whose duty was to work for the village for particular time] had to wait upon the Patil's

chawdi for the whole day. The *yeskar* Mahar had to go and collect his wage in the form of alms at upper caste houses every evening. "*Johar Mai-Baap*" [traditional salutation from mahar to the upper castes, literally meaning, "I salute you as my mother and father"]. This kind of cultural and traditional oppression were clamped on Dalits without mercy. The work of the *yeskar* often included tending to the horses of the visiting officials of British and Indian Officers. *yeskar* would be directed to tell his wife to arrange for grass stacks for the horses and to clean the stables. He had to arrange for firewood, give messages across the village and all this on an empty stomach.

The stick of the *yeskar* had bells that rung out announcing his presence. Whenever he went to ask for *bhakri* in the village at night. If the villagers hear the voice of the Mahar, when sitting down to eat, they had to put aside their full plates. The patio outside the main door was high; caste society had made sure that the architecture of homes maintained caste restrictions. They dealt with the Mahar from a height and a distance. Thus, the various sections of Dalits exploited in the name of culture, religion, and wealth. *Yeskar* Mahar collected a bundle of stale food and returned home where everyone waiting to taste the leftover:

....When he stood at the door of the high caste house, he was forbidden to call out. He had to

sound the bell on his stick thrice....His entire family would dine on this food...(PWB 75)

The Yeskar was not even to allow to voice in the upper caste street of his presence. The only freedom is to sound the bell. As Sharmila Rege, in her *Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women's Testimonios*, wonders the memory of Kamble that "Detailing life in the Maharwada, the residential quarters of the Mahars on the outskirts of the village in the 1920s"... (197).

The Maharwada symbolised utter poverty and total destitution. Besides men made deprivation, Epidemics, like cholera and plague were haunting epidemic that killed Mahars and they became victims. It is irony that whenever domestic animals die out of epidemics, the Mahar community would be happier to eat the meat:

When the summons came, the joy of the Mahars knew no bounds. Everybody shouted out to share the good news with others. The Mahar men would gather in front of the chawdi and set off with knives, leaving word for their wives to hurry after them with huge baskets. All the women and children would rush there, armed with baskets and can containers....After one animal was cut, the meat was divided into portions... (PWB 85-86)

Dalits stormed the animals flesh. The other livestock of Dalit women is the hacking of firewood. Mahar women cut thorny, prickles, and spiny woods. Sometimes, the women's body would be pierced and the blood would be sprayed on the woods. In spite the difficulties, poor women would bring the woods to the houses of Bhramin for sale. But the upper caste women would instruct to check for any blood strains. If the strains found it was considered pollution.

Whenever an upper caste people's wedding comes in the village, the Mahar had to work to collect extra firewood for the occasion, and also had to clean dishes after the meal. In return, the Mahar community get the leftovers of the wedding, which were then distributed in the community. The women went to the village to sweep and clean the *pandals* [the huge tents constructed for marriage] and received all the leftovers of the preparations made for the wedding feast, but not the wage.

Most of the Dalits were dependent on the leftover of upper caste people. All the menial jobs have been given to the Mahar including cleaning the shit of the upper caste bride and bridegrooms. Just as the Mahar had a duty towards dead animals, he also had a duty towards the dead people too. The merciless jobs imposed on Dalits are carrying death news, and digging the grave. In the scorching sun, heavy rains, and biting cold, the Mahar had to take the news even without food

and wage. If upper caste family is close to the death man, the Mahar had to carry the firewood to the cremation ground and wait at a distance. The Mahars have to deliver messages about deaths in the village and get the firewood ready for the funeral. Once the firewood was ready, they would wait on the sides to acquire the shroud that had covered the dead body and the bamboo that had carried it. This was then kept away for building the house and the shroud was washed thoroughly and used by Dalits as new clothe. Thus, Baby Kamble's encyclopedic narrations showed that she was a missionary of Dalit women.

Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* portrays his life-long-struggles like poverty, caste atrocities, and treacheries in the village Magadi of Karnataka. "Ooru" is the decent settlement of upper caste people where Dalits not allowed to move as free as possible. It has all facilities like shops, schools, and government offices. Usually, it is separated by road, pond, bushes, and men made walls. "Keri" is the colony where Dalits live; it is geographically separated from the main body of a village; socially, it is set off from the mainstream society. Siddalingaiah's childhood was submerged into poverty. His family belongs to farm labourers and gets low-income, sometime nothing. Going to day-school was a matter of social, political, and economic privilege during his childhood. For instance, Dalit students, including the

author, had not been allowed to sit along with upper class students in the class room.

Siddalingaiah grew up like any Dalit wanton boys – humiliated and unable to comprehend why his family was made to suffer. His early memories, he said, were of how his father was unable to find work in Magadi, causing the family to move finally to Bangalore. Hungry, suffering, and humiliation at odd jobs while studying are his chief memories; they made him lose faith in God, and also mark the beginning of his Dalit introspection.

Siddalingaiah eloquently articulates the evils of exploitation and their outcome. He reveals the experiences of day-to-day caste struggles, discrimination, poverty, and identity crisis. His determination, creativity, and courage helped him to outwit the brutality of caste system.

Siddalingaiah's parents were illiterate and worked as farm labourers. Ainoru was a land-owner and had a beautiful house with a huge pore well with bump-set cabin. Dalit people were not allowed to get water from this well. However, they used to go to far off places for fetching water. Siddalingaiah never saw others but the Dalits used to drink water from the upper caste man's well.

Dyavanna took Siddalingaiah to an orthodox Brahmin house. They gave them previous night's leftover *poori*. He never saw and ate a complete food like the leftover, "...

stood in front of his house, he gave us the citranna and poori leftover from the previous night. I had never tasted these delicacies before..." (OKA 2-3). Though he stood in the front door, but interested on the leftover. He describes the pitiable conditions of the suppressed community who starve for daily bread:

That was a time of drought everywhere. People had to struggle even for a morsel of food. Some threw ceremonial fests to appease the rain god. During fests, the Holeyas were made to sit in a corner. We were noticed only after people of the upper castes had been served. I felt contented with whatever little food came my way, and wouldn't think much about the discrimination. (OKA 7)

Famine and natural disasters affect all people equally, but Dalits were considered the last beneficiaries. Those who are rich in wealth given priority, but not Dalits - the untouchable in feelings.

Siddalingaiah's mother Venkatamma worked as a sweeper in a Dalit hostel in Srirampura. Every day after the hostel boys were served, the leftover was given to the workers. His mother used to take home the "mudde," and "saru" (meal). Leftover solves many of Dalits from starvation. In spite of abject poverty, Siddalingaiah attended free night-school. He began to realize self-respect and dignity from his teachers

at the school. As Ambedkar globalised the plight of untouchables by his educational knowledge, the author also began to earn self-empowerment through education, but he was not allowed to sit along with upper class students in the class room.

Hungry, humiliations, and odd jobs while studying are his chief social influences that made him to lose faith in God, and also marked the beginning of his Dalit introspection. He first emerged on the public scene as a student leader in the 1970s, a period when Dalit rights issues had begun triggering conflict with the upper classes. However, Siddalingaiah did not join active politics then because he had too much work on hand. Although he was both a teacher and an activist, it is his autobiography and poems that brought fame to his experience as Dalit. His writing give a realistic expression of Dalit in the recent years.

Due to famine, Siddalingaiah's family moved to the slum side of Bangalore City and his father worked in nearby firewood depots to run the family. His people used to go Shivanahalli tank and collected tuber, yams, and greens to make night meal. They are their main food. The people of his colony got into debt by Marwadi shop. Many times they even failed to pay the interest upon the debt. In this way, Siddalingaiah's father became a huge debtor. One day two

toughs beat him on the street. He was wailing and trying to escape. He was injured and clothes were thorn.

Siddalingaiah joined the Gopalaswamy Iyaer Hostel. It changed his life. Nearby Iyaer Hostel, Kannadigas and Tamils lived together in Srirampura. He used listen their inspiring speeches. His friends were delighted, and they raised money for his expenses. He began to deliver speeches on Ambedkar and caste system, and won numerous cups as prizes. Consequently, he sold the cups to pay for his books and clothes. He acquired more knowledge about the orthodox Hinduism and caste system. He became a rationalist and started opposing Hindu beliefs. In one of his speeches, he spoke on the topic "God does not exist." He put off the light which was pointed out as evidence to the existence of God. He challenged, "If God does exist, will it stop me speaking" (81). In this competition, he won the first prize. As he was influenced by Ambedkarite's thoughts and ideologies, he was in turn delivering the doctrines to his mass. His friends were quite amazed by his social consciousness.

Siddalingaiah joined the Karnataka Association and was elected the Joint Secretary. He got an opportunity to associate himself with leaders like Dejjagow, Mariyappa Bhatta, G. Venkatasbhaiah and G.S. Shivarudrappa. Later he founded a society called Vicharavadi Parishat and visited all Dalits hostels around Bangalore. The association brought out

the problems of hygiene, food, etc. He demonstrated the plight of Dalits to the Government of Karnataka. The then Chief Minister of Karnataka Shri Devaraj Urs accepted to increase the scholarship amount, and ordered to renovate the Dalit hotels. Siddalingaiah, being attracted by Periyar's speeches, got the opportunity to meet Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker who was invited to Bangalore. In this way, his political affairs improved with rationalists. He also published his poetry in the magazine *Shudra*. As a night school student, he realized the importance of night school. He started night schools for Bangalore's slum children. The night school enlightened many downtrodden lives. They shout, "...Do something to get us to attend your classes..." (OKA 101). In this manner, Siddalingaiah evoked his tragic experiences to educated fellow men and women.

Bama's *Karukku* portrays Dalits social status of a village in Tamil Nadu. The underprivileged are supposed to work for daily wages in Naickers' fields. She begins to narrate her own experiences which resemble the experiences of Dalits community as a whole. In this sense, Dalit and African American autobiographies are standing in same scale. As Lindon Barrett, "Self-Knowledge, Law, and African American autobiography: Lucy A. Delaney's *From the Darkness Cometh the Light*," stated, "African American autobiographies has been the relation between the individual and the communal" (105).

Most of the agricultural land belonged to the Naicker [a land owning upper caste] community in Madurai District, Tamil Nadu. Each Naicker's fields were spread over many miles. The fields called *olivishikkaadu*, the fields known as *mandavak kaadu*, *otthaalu kaadu*, *chadayaalu kaadu* and the field with the lotus pond. Her people know all the fields by their names and turned up exactly where they were required to work. Bama's mother used to pick up field works to feed her children. Her people would go to the lake-side in the evening, pluck some wild greens leaves like *Kuppaikira* or *thoyilukkira*, drumstick leaves, and eat it with quickly stirred and thickened *ragi* dough. During holidays, Bama worked in gleaning groundnuts, collecting firewood, picking up dry dung. Some occasion Bama and her sister took available gruel, but her mother would be in hunger:

Apart from us, one after the other, there were the houses of the Thevar, Chettiyaar, Aasaari, and Nadar. Beyond that were the Naicker streets. The Udaiyaar, too, had a small settlement there for themselves. I don't know how it came about that the upper-caste communities and the lower caste-communities were separated like this into different parts of the village...(Karukku 6)

Dalits worked in the field of upper caste on daily basis. Their hard works were exploited half the time by Naicker

employers. So there was no progress in the life of Dalits. Along with Naicker, the tradesmen also swindled their hard work and labour. Bama went work to the Naicker's field. Dalits were not allowed to touch the goods of the Naickers:

Until the time that I was in the eighth class, I worked in my village in all these ways. All the time I went to work for the Naickers, I knew I should not touch their goods or chattels; I should never come close to where they were. I should always stand away to one side. These were their rules. I often felt pained and ashamed. But there was nothing that I could do. They belonged to a higher caste. They had the money. We had to listen to what they said. However furious or resentful I felt in my heart, I have stepped aside for them, along with the other women of my community.

(*Karukku* 46)

The lives of the Dalits entirely depended upon the mercy of the Naickers. If Naicker families did not allow Dalits for any agricultural labour, then they would go up to the woods on the mountains, and make a simple living by gathering firewood and selling it. As Rajkumar says, in his book, "Either way their earnings were meagre. Poverty was rampant in Dalit families..." (232-34).

In India, each village is a heaven of contest between the upper caste. They are economically and socially strong. But the untouchables are economically poor and numerically small. The world people may not even realise how caste is deep-rooted in beyond India. Upper caste people value a person's caste, rather than his/her love for humanity.

In *The Scar*, Gunasekaran unfolds deep pains and sufferings of his life and Dalit community in Southern Tamil Nadu. In school days he did weeding work in upper caste (Konars') farm land to meet his family and school expenses. He purchased second hand cloths for Deepavali. As a matter of fact, it is the low-caste people economic status in the all states of India. In his village, whenever the irrigation tank has water in, his grandmother used to take him to catch snails and slugs for their meat. Since Dalits deprived of hygienic environment, they never ate a full meal especially a decent meal. For that they were deprived of economic sufficiency:

....The meat would be chopped up and portioned out. Some would pay money for it. Others would exchange it for chilies, paddy, tamarind, etc. On the days when the pigs are killed, every house would have pork and rice. Everybody ate pork meat in the cheri. In the days when the irrigation tank has

water in it, my ammayi would take me along with her
and look for snails and slugs...(The Scar 41)

As a son of school teacher, Gunasekaran was respected by all Muslim community and he was given special access into their home and mosque. He often used to go mosque for prayer along with his Muslim friends. Similarly, Gunasekaran used to go Rasoola Samundram - a inhabitation Parayars and Chakiliyars (Arundathiyar). Wilson was his friend who taught him harmonium. Along with Kalairaj, and Dr. Muniyandi, Gunasekaran used to stage plays for Christmas.

To ease out the poverty, Gunasekaran and his elder brother Karunanidhi would angle for fish in ponds from morning to evening most of the time without even lunch. Gunasekaran used to sell the fish in street of Elayankudi and Padhur. He would buy rice with that money and the entire family would have dinner at the night. He also sold Neem seeds in season. Most mornings his family members ate tamarind seeds as breakfast. His family lived in a rented house. It can be understood from the words of a notable politician and writer Ravikumar, in his introduction to the life writing:

I want to point out two important issues related to the form called autobiography. Portrayed as the voice of the victim, the Dalit autobiography is a testimony and an appeal. The person who submits it

does not have the right to judge. It is also doubtful if the Dalit autobiographies would remain the same if they were to take up a judgemental role. Autobiographies are written based on truthfulness and trustworthiness...(The Scar xvi)

Gunasekaran remembered his pathetic condition in the Elayankudi village and his memories are experienced testimonies. The magnitude of caste superiority has devastated in his boyhood itself. This psychological humiliation made another scar in his heart. It is the prevailing social experience in every corner of India. He already began to observe the post-independent social condition.

As Thirumavalvan [a Dalit activist, Member of Parliament (MP) in 15th Lok Sabha and the current President of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) of Tamil Nadu] insisted that the Dalit situation of discrimination should not be seen only as a Dalit problem" (qtd. in Nadkarni 97). It is a problem of the depravity of the whole society. He bemoans the fact that the issue of communalism is not sidetracked as the problem of the Muslims. It is not just the problem of poverty and of a people lagging behind in the economic competition. The whole Indian society and polite is ranged against Dalits, which may get reflected in the writings too. The Dalit

leaders thus see the problem primarily as on in the sphere of society and polity, and only secondarily in the economy.

In economic terms, many Dalits are agricultural coolies in a large number. They were also called unskilled occupations. These agricultural coolies are from different religious and caste communities. *The Constitution of India* terms these groups the "socially and educationally backward classes," and authorities government to provide them with special benefits to help them overcome their disabilities. One of the themes of most Dalit autobiographies is the socioeconomic conditions of Dalits in India. All the authors depicted their poor conditions of food, shelter, settlement, and culture within and around the Indian society. They also gave their psychological impacts meted out by caste exploitations.

Making sense of autobiographies is necessarily a culturally conditioned and socially reflexive process. Martin Barker, *Comic: Ideology, Power and the Critics*, explains, "the first function of language is to establish social relations between human beings in society" (265). As a medium, autobiography authentically establishes the individual relationship of Dalits and non-Dalits. All the writers are integral part of the Indian society. Most of the sources and incidents used in their autobiographies are the productions of Indian society, which are the objects of the

research that bound up with the socio economic of state and society. As Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany say:

....For the present purposes Indian poverty can more usefully be defined as the sum of low standards of nutrition, health, housing, general material consumption, and formal education. By these criteria, the Untouchables are overwhelmingly a poor people. The principal source, as opposed to the measure, of Untouchables' poverty is their relationship with agricultural land. There is a relentless logic that flows from their being an agrarian people without strong land assets. (30)

Dalits neither manage economic problem nor escape from the caste prejudice. They have been living in mercy of upper caste people. In fact, there are several aids from government and foreign countries. They were victims of multiple social welfare and security. Sesha Kethineni and Gail Diane Humiston, "Dalits, the "Oppressed People" of India: How are Their Social, Economic, and Human Rights Addressed?" stated:

Dalit claim that their economic, social, and cultural (ESC) rights, as well as their civil and political rights, have been violated by the government and its entities for centuries. They argue that the government should recognise and

enforce ESC rights. Furthermore, they contend that violations should be punished. (110)

Dalits had been deprived in multiple means: denial of education, knowledge, and access to resources like land, water, and social involvement. The poor income and severe poverty depresses the Dalits. Premchand is known for realistic novels and he is regarded as the "Emperor of Hindi novels." He wrote about feudal system, slavery, and exploitation. His novels are portrayal of peasants as the leading characters and with village as centre of plot. These Dalit writers are from the peasant family particularly daily wages. They do not have wealthy resources, but courage and determination. As Waghmare opined, "These narratives came to represent not the journey of an individual voice, emotion and consciousness but rather a social and community based chorus of voices" (qtd. in Sharmila Rege 13).

Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany also claimed that "In many regions of India it is poverty rather than social oppression that presents itself as the principal disability of people from the Untouchables castes..." (11). This chapter brought out the portrayal of deprived socio-economic conditions of Dalit authors survived from the men made barriers, conventions, and atrocities. However Dalits study and improve in socio-economic sphere; they have been undervalued with abrasive perspectives.

Chapter III

Social Discriminations: Caste and Gender

The faith in caste system imposes enormous obstacles on the quests of Dalits for civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Dalits' ambitions for social emancipations were depicted in the autobiographies Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and K.A. Gunasekaran. Caste denotes a system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups. Caste divisions also dominate in housing, marriage, and general social interaction – divisions that are reinforced through the practice and threat of social ostracism, economic boycotts, and even physical violence.

Although the history of untouchability goes back to the period of the "Vedas" and "Puranas," Dalits are direct victims of caste and gender discriminations in every spectrum of Indian states. As the world communities know, beliefs can be dangerous when people misuse it to gain positions of absolute power and prestige in society. These blind beliefs plague the Indian society and get translated into illogical, cruel, and intolerant actions against specific communities such as the Dalits. As Tom O'Neill says in his report "Untouchables:"

To be born a Hindu in India is to enter the caste system, one of the world's longest surviving forms of social stratification. Embedded in Indian culture for the past 1,500 years, the caste system follows a basic precept: All men are created unequal. The ranks in Hindu society come from a legend in which the main groupings, or *varnas*, emerge from a primordial being. From the mouth come the Brahmins—the priests and teachers. From the arms come the Kshatriyas—the rulers and soldiers. From the thighs come the Vaisyas—merchants and traders. From the feet come the Sudras—laborers. Each varna in turn contains hundreds of hereditary castes and subcastes with their own pecking orders.

(National Geographic Magazine)

Discriminations on the basis of caste and gender are prevalent mainly in India. Dalits were not allowed to entertain temples, tea shops, and schools, and in upper caste settlements. In spite of these deprivation and exploitation, Dalits attempt to claim their rights in education and employment. However, they are often encountering strong resistance from the upper caste people, resulting in inhuman assault, torture, rapes, massacres, and other forms of atrocities.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Center for Human Rights, Global Justice (CHRGJ), and the University School of Law at New York state that, "Discriminatory and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of over 167 million people in India has been justified on the basis of caste" (6). Caste is descent-based and hereditary in nature. It is a characteristic determined by one's birth into a particular caste, irrespective of the faith practiced by the individual. Caste denotes a traditional system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups defined by descent and occupation.

In 2002, the Durban Conference on Racial Discrimination of the United Nations turned out to be an initiative in linking the problem with activists and academics. The caste and race prejudices continue everywhere in the world. Though the socio-economic life of the Dalits is improving, the levels of humiliation and discrimination on Dalits have been accounted in the autobiographies. The caste animosity throughout the narrations are heart breaking. They made deep impact on the lives of the authors. It is the actual behavior towards members of another group and involves excluding or restricting members of one group from opportunities that are available to other groups.

The practice of caste system has been condemned by many Indian leaders, including most recently by Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh, in the report of Human Rights Watch (HRW),
Manmohan Singh says:

Unless the government accepts responsibility to end the widespread prejudice, crimes against Dalits will continue. India has consistently cited its numerous legislations and government policies as a measure of compliance with its obligations to end caste-based discrimination, choosing to ignore its failure to implement these measures which has resulted in continued, and sometimes enhanced, brutalities against Dalits. ("Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India's Untouchables," *Rincoceros*)

Moreover, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 enforcement officials usually refuse to register the complaints of Dalits. This is worsened by the political parties in India that talk big about empowering the Dalits but they maintain dignified silence. At such moments, caste system embraces discriminations as part of its dogma.

Gender discrimination refers to the practice of denying privileges to a person particularly based on gender especially women. In India, this discrimination is religious, and longstanding. It is acceptable to all the religions of India. Sociologically, the word "gender" refers to the way

societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles.

The distinction between sex and gender was introduced to deal with the general tendency to attribute women's subordination to their anatomy. For ages, it was believed that the different characteristics, roles, and status accorded to women and men in society are determined by sex, that they are natural, and therefore not changeable. Gender is seen closely related to the roles and behaviour assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences.

As soon as a child is born in India, society begins the process of gendering. The birth of the son is celebrated, the birth of a daughter is filled with pain; sons are showered with love, respect, better food, and proper health care. Boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing; girls are encouraged to be homebound and shy. All these differences are gender differences and they are created by society.

Gender inequality is therefore a form of discrimination as distinct from other forms of economic and social inequalities. It dwells not only outside the household but also centrally within it. It stems not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments between women and men but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions. Gender inequality has adverse impact on development goals and reduces economic growth. It hampers the

overall well being because blocking women from participation in social, political, and economic activities can adversely affect the whole society.

Many developing countries including India have displayed gender inequality in education, employment, and health. It is common to find girls and women suffering from high mortality rates. There are vast differences in the education level of the two sexes. India has witnessed gender inequality from its early history due to its socio-economic and religious practices that resulted in a wide gap between the position of men and women in society. These kind of exclusive discriminations on Dalits are portrayed in the select autobiographies.

In 1950, as a school boy, Omprakash Valmiki faced caste discrimination right from his school. With encouragement of his father, Omprakash got admission. But he was not allowed primarily for his "Dalithood." In spite of heartbreaking ill-treatment by his classmates and teachers, he attended the school. Even, the headmaster of the school, Kaliram, traced his caste as "Chuhre" and asked him to sweep the class and playground, as that was his descent based occupation. In the preface to *Joothan*, Omprakash explains that, apart from humiliation, he gave proper respect to the teacher "Ji" - an agreement of command:

One day the headmaster, Kaliram, called me to his room and asked: "Abey, what is your name?"

"Omprakash," I answered slowly and fearfully.

Children used to feel scared just encountering the headmaster. The entire school was terrified of him.

"Chuhre ka?" the headmaster threw his second question at me.

"Ji."

"All right. See that teak tree there? Go. Climb that tree. Break some twigs and make a broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is, after all, your family occupation. (JUL 5)

In this context, Omprakash has mentioned that his not only protested against this exploitation but it also gave psychological strength to him. It had an ever-lasting optimistic influence on his personality development. His father supposed to see Omprakash when he was sweeping the ground. The upper caste teachers and school-mates discriminated him after knowing his caste. Besides, Omprakash was kept out of extracurricular activities. He wished to participate, but he was not allowed by the teachers since all the teachers were Tyagis. During the examinations, he would not drink water from the glass. The peon would pour water from way high up, lest his hands touch the glass.

When he was in the seventh standard, Omprakash joined the scout troop. He requested a washer-man to have ironing his Khaki uniform. The washer-man [a Dalit], afraid of upper caste people's patronage, refused to wash Omprakash's Khaki uniform. He returned back home with humiliations by his fellow man:

We don't wash the clothes of the Chuhra-Chamars.
Nor do we iron them. If we iron your clothes, then the Tagas won't get their clothes washed by us. We will lose our *roti*. He had answered me bluntly. His reply crushed me. I left without saying a word. My heart was heavy. I lost faith in God. One can somehow get past poverty, deprivation, but it is impossible to get past caste. (JUL 21)

There were caste pride in all men and women of India. The people of a particular caste never respects another sub-caste people. Even Dalits themselves were afraid of their upper caste clients in terms of income and other means of earning. When Omprakash was good in study, it was not tolerable to the upper caste students. In the July or august 1962, he went to school. Brajesh, a Taga's son, attacked him for his development in study. "You will remain a Chuhra, however much you study" (32). Howsoever Dalits improve in study, they were not allowed to sit, eat, and socialise with upper caste people. If a Dalit began to improve, he or she

will not be entertained. Omprakash accompanied Hiram Singh's marriage procession in Morna. In the wedding procession, an upper caste woman enquired about Hiram Singh and Omprakash:

"You...in which class?

"I have sat for the ninth's exam..."

"The Chuhras' progeny also study in the school? She said in surprise. "Howsoever much you study, you will still remain a Chuhra," she said, taking out her frustration...(JUL 38)

This incident has been tormenting him. The upper caste uneducated woman failed to give a compliment. Omprakash passed Secondary Examination, and became the first Dalit from his settlement to do so. His father proudly celebrated the success. As a gesture of appreciation, Chaman Lal Tyagi invited Omprakash and gave full meal in his home. Amidst rampant atrocities and humiliation, Lal's behavior was never expected by the author.

Omprakash joined in Barla Inter College. Brajpal Singh Tyagi was a science teacher who sent Bhikhuram and Omprakash to his village to bring wheat and vegetables. After knowing that these two are from Barla, Brajpal Singh Tyagi's father questioned what was their caste. Omprakash answered, "We are of the Chuhra caste"(60). Immediately, the elder hit Bhikhuram and obscenities began to flow from his mouth. Luckily, a few village people saved the life of the little

Dalit boys. However, the upper caste people loaded wheat and food-grains on their head as "beast of burden."

When Omprakash was preparing for the Tenth annual examination, Brajpal Singh Tyagi teacher asked, "If any student wants to ask me anything..." (*JUL 64*). Keeping this offer, Omprakash one day went to the staff room for clarification in mathematics. Brajpal Singh Tyagi told Omprakash to come to his home in the following Sunday. He went to Brajpal Singh Tyagi's home. But he was not in home, and he had gone out without any informing information. But, Brajpal's family member sent Omprakash to fetch water:

....By the time I came back, he had left. When I asked his wife, she said, "I don't know where he went. He did not tell me." I sat there waiting. His wife was busy with her chores. When it got very late, she asked, "What was it you want from him?" I said, "I needed to ask something about math." She got busy again. After waiting for a long time, I left. My heart was full of bitterness... (*JUL 65*)

One day in school, Master Sahib taught Dronacharya and his lesson. The master gave permission to clear doubts. He asked why the Chuhras were put under poverty to drink *mar*, rice water. For this, he was severely punished. The master has beaten on his back with stick. When he is in ninth class, financial situation of his family worsened. In those days, as

he remembers, the Chuhra's responsibility is to dispose dead cattle without any payment. While his father was out of village, Brahmdev Taga's bullock was dead. In order to get the skin, his mother summoned him to accompany the disposal. Along with Solhar Chacha, he skinned the dead bullock and sold the leather. From the amount, Omprakash bought text books. He was not be able to forget this bitter memory. It is the message to the Dalits to aspire for education.

Omprakash's teacher Brajpal Singh sent Bhikhuram and Omprakash to get wheat. In the teacher's home, they were give lunch. One of the teacher's relatives asked him where they were from? Omprakash answered that they were from Barla. He also asked the next question, "What is your caste" and was answered "We are of the Chuhra caste" (60). Bhikhuram's upper caste people lift heavy stick and hit them. The hollowness of the hospitality is exposed and respect is given on the guest's caste. His truth on telling the caste had resulted in humiliation – beating and insults. This kind of humiliation is in every village of India. Yet, his father gave Omprakash hope to study in the new place:

Pitaji gave me permission to go to Dehra Dun. The day I left home, he became very emotional, telling me, "Son, you are a child of a poor Chuhra. Always remember that." (JUL 77)

In 1965, Omprakash was in the Eleventh standard. Narendra Kumar Tyagi was the new mathematics Lecturer. The lecturer asked Omprakash to fetch water, but he said, "Master Sahib, I am not permitted even to touch those pitchers. Please send someone else" (*JUL* 75). Brajpal Singh Tyagi teacher and the principal, Yashveer Tyagi conspired to fail Omprakash in the chemistry lab of the Eleventh standard. Omprakash failed in the Intermediate examination despite securing good marks in all subject except Chemistry practical papers (in fact, he was not allowed to do experiments on the pretext by his teacher). Before the power of upper caste teachers, the poor Omprakash was unable to survive. He was in the failure list. These kinds of deliberate caste assaults have been ripping Omprakash from time to time.

After experiencing such assaults, Omprakash's older brother Jasbir, who was working in the Survey of India, took Omprakash to Dayanand Anglo-Vedic (DAV) College, Dehra Dun. Omprakash got an opportunity to know and read about Dr. Ambedkar and the caste system. Premkumar Sharmaji is a teacher in DAV college who deliberately failed him in the lab too. With the help of Purushottam, Omprakash applied for training to operate machines at Instrument Research and Development Establishment (IRDE) in Raipur, Dehradun. He was forced to drop his study in DAV college and join in the Instrument Research and Development Establishment. In this

institution, he enjoyed all facilities including library and games.

On 1 July 1968, he applied for further training at the Ordnance Factory Training Institute in Khamaria near Jabalpur. In July 1970, Omprakash got job in OFTI in Bombay. He came across Vijay Tendulkar's Marathi plays, and began to stage plays in many venues in Ambernath. He wrote an article on the incident of blinding the Ganwai brother by upper-caste people in the *Navabarat Times* of Bombay. His factory principal warned him not to indulge in such caste oriented writings.

Omprakash got friendship of Vinayak Sadashiv Kulkarni, a Maharastrian Brahmin, in the neighborhood of Ambernath. The Brahmin used to come to the mess and ate meat in the mess account of Omprakash. Mrs. Kulkarni and Svita also became friends to him.

One day, professor Kamble visited Kulkarni house and discussed about Marathi plays. Mrs. Kulkarni offered the professor tea in a different cup. Later Omprakash learnt that the professor was a Mahar. He consoled himself that even well-educated people in a metropolitan city like Bombay indulging in such behaviour. He revealed his caste to Savita; after that they never met, "...While drinking my tea, I noticed Kamble's cup. It was different from the cups offered to the rest of us..." (JUL 109)

Savita developed a love affection for him without knowing his caste. She persuaded him on many occasions to go to the movies. But he refused and maintained his respect. Later he acknowledged his caste to her, and consequently, Savita left him forever. In the project entitled "*Civil Society Approach towards Achieving Equality and Realization of the Rights of Scheduled Castes in India*," European Initiative for Democracy Human Rights (EIDHR) found the prevalence of the practice of the "double glass system" (5).

At this situation, a new Commandant of the DSC arrived from Muzaffarnagar District, near Barla. He was asked to get acquainted with the Commandant by Kureishi. Omprakash hesitated to meet the Commandant. For friendship, Omprakash, Chandrakala, Mrs.Kureishi, and Kureishi met the Commandant Sahib and began to introduce Omprakash. The Commandant traced Omprakash's caste and did not allow him to sit. Before they were asked to sit, the Sahib asked "Barla is a Tyagi village. Which caste are you from?"(134). Despite study and employment, Dalits are still victims to this kind of injustices:

... he asked, "Barla is a Tyagi village. Which caste are you from?" I looked at Kureishi, whose faced had changed color. He had asked the question conversationally. The moment I said that my caste

was Chuhra, the Commandant became uneasy....This was a new experience for Kureishi. (*JUL* 134)

From the native place itself, the caste remains with a person from the locality like the dialect. After asking the native place, the Commandant Sahib's idea moved to caste. Even though, he is a Commandant, he wanted to give respect after knowing the caste. Omprakash is determined not to hid (impersonating) his caste, rather he ready to struggle.

Following this incident, in 1985 Omprakash was transferred to Dehra Dun. He did training at Ordinance Factory Training Institute in Khamaria, Jabalour. While in the training, he applied for Competitive examination. The in-charge of training Mr. Gupta examined his application. On seeing the place names Barla and Muzaffarnagar, his anger and surprise burst out together. He exclaimed "Abey, Cohre, he has got this far!" (*JUL* 144). The word "Cohre" humiliated Omprakash and started to responded. Immediately, his friends stopped him from the quarrel they advised him:

....When I protested, he got even more enraged and obnoxious. "You!...You will teach me manners?" he bellowed. His behavior made me very angry..."These people want you to take a wrong step so that they can throw you out of the institute. Learn to recognize their traps." (*JUL* 144)

So far Omprakash experienced caste related humiliations in villages, schools, colleges, and in government factories. But now he is facing problems in his name itself. The surname "Valmiki" is a Dalit. A Brahmin in Bombay thought Omprakash is a Brahmin by his last name "Valmiki." After a few days, Omprakash told his real caste and their friendship never continued. There are many occasions where the press and publishers never want his name "Valmiki" in his articles and poetry whenever they were published.

Omprakash acknowledges that, "Caste is a very important element of Indian society" (*JUL* 153). Birth determines a civilian's destiny. Omprakash felt that Dalit and poor people's homes were burnt; Dalit women were raped and murdered. The Hindu people worship trees, plants, beasts, and birds, but they are intolerant of Dalits. Omprakash also felt that, "...poverty, illiteracy, broken lives, the pain of standing outside the door, how would the civilized Savarna Hindus know it?" (*JUL* 154). Bhagwan Das, in his article "Socio-Economic Problems of Dalits," provides a comprehensive snapshot of how untouchability affects the day-to-day lives of Dalits today. He says in addition to that:

A superior gives bad reports to a Dalit subordinate in order to obstruct his promotion. In every day talk in the canteens, buses, trains and air-planes, offices and establishments, aspersions are cast on

the men and women of untouchable origin and
derogatory remarks are passed.(xxiv)

Omprakash encapsulated the pains, humiliations, and poverty of Dalits. His encounters with various school teachers, show how Dalit children are abused verbally and physically. There is no one to rescue Dalit even after 1950. "One gentleman has ripped this argument to pieces, "What is so brave about that?....After all he is a Chuhra. His surname spares us the hassle of asking what his caste is" (143).

According to Omprakash, Dalits who have become educated still face terrible crisis – the crisis of identity. Dalits want to assimilate with the mainstream society, but the caste Hindus prevent them from doing so. They discriminate against Dalits. They think of them as inferior beings. They cast doubts on their intelligence, their ability, and their performance. They use all kinds of nefarious means to attack Dalits.

At a train journey, Omprakash and his wife felt the heinous act of discrimination from a prosperous caste Hindu's family who journeyed in the same compartment. They started talking about the beauty of Rajasthan and its men and matters. At the juncture of their conversation, the woman of caste Hindu asked his wife: "What is your caste"? (*JUL* 153). Then Omprakash replied, "Bhangi – Untouchable." As soon as they heard the word "Bhangi," they lapsed into total silence.

The two family did not indulge in conversation till the journey ended. The journey became very painful to Omprakash and his wife. Right from his childhood, Omprakash have been facing lot of pricking like this:

.....I have asked many scholars to tell me why savarnas hate Dalits and Sudras....The Hindus who worship trees and plants, beasts and birds, why are they so intolerant of Dalits?...(*JUL* 154)

The level of economic exploitation was very high and clubbed with social discrimination. These become the worst living atmosphere for the Omprakash community. This created a shockwave. This social context makes Omprakash to question religion and subsequently challenging it in all possible ways.

In *Growing Up Untouchable in India*, Vasant Moon never appreciated his settlement; rather, he questioned that the living places themselves were arranged according to caste. He also portrayed the social conflicts for dignity, politics, and religions. He pathetically recorded the place of toilet where most of the sorrows and happiness of the communities were discussed.

The emancipator, Babasaheb Ambedkar brought awareness that the entire aboriginal people were exploited by Bhramins, Vaishyas, Kshatriyas, and Shudras. They did not allow the

Dalits to improve the standard of living and branded them as untouchables forever:

At the east end of the settlement stood very long apartment buildings; beyond that lived a mixed colony of Brahmans, Marwaris, Bengalis, and Madrasis. A north-south road ran by Dhanwate's house on the corner parallel to the railway tracks. Towards the northeast was a long-established Mahar temple of Vitthal and Rukmini...these were toilets that told stories of their unbroken link to the cultural life of a community of four or five thousand people, that stored the remains of the sorrows and joys of their history...(GUI 2)

The sub-caste pride are within the heart and blood of each caste. There are Ladvans, Burkes, Zhade Ghavunes and Somvashis under one term, the Dalits. Vasant Moon drew the social cold-war – the caste pride. Before his birth, these community people never ate food in another's caste house because of a "fierce pride" (GUI 6). There were inter caste quarrels among Dalits in the Maharpura:

Many sub-castes existed in the community, eight to ten houses of Ladvans, eight to ten of the Barkes. All these were on the southern side of the neighbourhood, while the Zhade-Ghavanés and

Somvashis were in the middle, and the entire rest of the neighbourhood belonged to the Bavanes.

Before I was born, the subcastes didn't eat in each other's houses. At public gatherings they sat in separate rows....Everyone had a fierce pride in his subcaste. The disagreements that had gone on for years and years to some extent came to an end with the struggle of Babasaheb Ambedkar...(GUI 6-7)

The sub-caste people are allowed to enter the street of Bhramin. Since they were middle caste, they enjoyed social affairs with each other. Yet they themselves set off margins to discriminate based on caste or sub-caste. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) used to hold its branch meetings on Sitabardi's Gita Ground, near the Bhide girls' school. After the beginning of the Samata Sainik Dal (SSD), all the Mahar youth left the RSS chapter. All young and old men of the community began coming to the Dal:

"When the football went to the Sangh side, they grabbed it and began an argument.

"Hey, you cunt, are you giving it back or what?

"Yeah, don't swear."

"Why are you starting a fight?"

....The next day the police began a close search in Maharpura. They confiscated many swords...(GUI 74)

These political factions in 1930s between the Dalits and the upper castes triggered violence and killing of Dalits. The SSD is the party of Babasaheb Ambedkar. The RSS is supported by the upper caste. There were always clashes between the communities over the playground. The RSS people planned to attack the Dal's Dalit members over the Gita Ground [Playgrounds]. All the communities played there. But the RSS supporters planned to encroach the ground by attacking the Dalits. Being born in Dalit community, these people were even not allowed to use public places and sometimes grave-yard. After an engagement of attack, police confiscated many deadly weapons. But no arrests were made on the upper caste side. But there was Dr. Masuji – a veteran who saved the lives of the Mahar community from time to time. Thus, a few people helped Dalits:

....In Mumbai, Mahars were not supposed to touch the thread, so they didn't get employed in the weaving department. Here, weaving was a major occupation of our people. Because of this there was no ban on weaving work in the mills....Among those one was Masuji's. Dr.Masuji was a god to the Mahar community. If anyone got sick, he would go to Masuji. He had lost one eye in World-War-I.

(GUI 79-80)

Even after Vasant Moon's graduation of M.A., he felt discrimination in educational institutions. A university gave him M.A. Marathi with "Second Class" degree. He hoped to get a lecturer's post in a college. After a few days, the university sent him a degree with a "Third Class." Since he was a Dalit, his aspiration to good position deteriorated. It is an act of deliberate oppression. Can any university withdraw a degree? It is the people who do the works of discrimination:

I took the second-year M.A. exams three years later, while employed, as an external student. I had thought I would get second class for the M.A. examinations. However, I received third rank in the results. When the report card came there was a second rank mark. This was sufficient merit to get a job as a professor. However, I wanted a degree. So I corresponded with the university about getting a rank according to the report card. After much correspondence the university informed me that "Your report card is mistaken." They sent a corrected second report card and gave me a third rank. That was how my dream of becoming a professor got spoiled. (GUI 123)

Vasant Moon never stopped from this dark behaviour of the both upper castes and the Government officers. Later, he

edited the speeches of Ambedkar and wrote many books in the English language. Though Dalits were educated and followed good characters, they have been discriminated for their birth and identity. The college principal Sinha made a heartbreaking comment at the aspiration of Pundalik – a Dalit. The abuse burnt the heart and made scar on Dalit students' minds:

...How do you Scheduled Caste people aspire for Honours?....When Pundalik came out of the principal's room and met me, he told about this. The scorching blast of caste hatred left a scar on our minds. There was no question but that Pundalik was intelligent and that he had the command of English required for Honors. (*GUI* 134)

As Raj Kumar praised in his book, "But in spite of all these successes Moon's autobiography is not a book of celebration; it is a social document which tells us how difficult it is for a Dalit to grow in India" (194). It can be found that education is the only visa for Dalits to enter into a universal standard of life. As M. Velusamy gave the statistics, in his article "Social and political History of Dalit Emancipation: Pre and Post Independence Period:"

Literacy and level of education are two basic indicators of the level of development achieved by

a group or society. Literacy results in more awareness besides contributing to the overall improvement of health, hygiene and other social conditions.

According to the 2001 Census, percentage of SC literate person (those who can read and write with understanding) aged 7 years and above is 63.2, which is lower than 73.5 percenti reported for the population as a whole. The literacy rate, which was 46.7 percent in 1991, has increased by 16.5 percentage points in 2001. (109)

Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* is entirely different from upper caste women's autobiography which exclusively reflects the failure in married life, longing for gender equality, and breaking of traditions. Kamble aims to plead the world audience. Of course, *The Prisons We Broke* narrated Dalit women's experiences for mass transition of both culture and caste.

There were about sixteen Mahar houses in Maharwada. Baby Kamble said that her community people were illiterate and were not allowed to move freely in their village. If Mahar women wished to buy provisions at the upper caste's shop *Aakhaadh*, they would have to wait in the shop until all others had left. The shopkeeper took this opportunity to educate his children, moving around the shop compound, about

the principles and practices of untouchability. The women would pull their clothes closer to their bodies, also telling their children to keep a distance from the upper castes. The sale was completed with the owner throwing things onto a cloth from a safe distance and the untouchables keeping the money at the doorstep.

Mahar women were not allowed to stay, move or express their feelings. The Mahar women were not allowed to touch the goods of upper caste people but allowed to clean the toilet, vessels, and food-grains. Baby Kamble remembers:

....The old woman in the house would be given the duty to tend the chulha. Once this was done, the lady of the house would go to the village shop. Standing in the courtyards, keeping a distance from the shopkeeper, she would pull her pallav over her face and then, using the most reverential and polite terms of address, she would beg him with utmost humility to sell her the thing she wanted. 'Appasab, could you please give this despicable Mahar woman some shikakai for one paisa and half a shell of dry coconut with black skin?' The shopkeeper's children would be trickling out into the courtyard for their morning ablutions. He would give the innocent children lessons in social behavior, 'Chabu, hey you, can't you see the dirty

Mahar woman standing there? Now don't you touch her. Keep your distance.' Immediately our Mahar woman, gathering her rags around her tightly so as not to pollute the child, would say, 'Take care little master! Please keep a distance. Don't come too close...(PWB 13-14)

Dalit women's autobiographies differ from the life-stories of the upper caste women's autobiographies. Baby Kamble's autobiography is accumulated with much real phenomenon and excelled in the true the plot and characters. Hinduism gave Dalits low grade position and did not even allow them to wear good dress. These were detailed portrayal of Baby Kamble:

The entire community had sunk deep in the mire of such dreadful superstitions. The upper castes had never allowed this lowly caste of ours to acquire knowledge. Generations after generations, our people rotted and perished by following such a superstitious way of life. Yet, we kept believing in your Hindu religion and serving you faithfully.
(PWB 37)

The brutal behaviour of upper caste people, particularly in their cultural, religious, and political perspective. According to Hinduism, Dalits were branded as *avarna*

(Outcaste) and were not allowed to acquire the basic knowledge and learn highly skilled job. The upper caste people never wanted to lose the temper of discrimination. Further, they were ready to violate the basic human rights of millions of Dalits:

....They were not allowed to use the regular road that was used by the higher castes....'No! You Mahars are transgressing you limits....Everybody, even the neighbours and relatives, would join in the fray, and abuse the girl to their heart's content. (PWB 52-54)

The Mahar women were not allowed to wear as the upper caste women. On the contrary, they have to tuck their saris border: "A mahar women was supposed to hide the borders under the pleats; otherwise it was considered an offence to the high castes" (PWB 54). The Mahar women used to sell firewood for their survival in high caste lane. The Brahmin would examine the firewood for any blood strain or strand of hair:

The Brahmin kaki, sitting in the cool shade and supervising this operation, would keep shouting instruction after instruction, 'Listen carefully, you dumb Mahar women, check the sticks well. If you overlook any of the threads sticking to the wood, there will be a lot of trouble. But what's that to

you? Your carelessness will cost us heavily. Our house will get polluted. Then we will have to polish the floor with cow dung and wash all our clothes, even the rags in the house! Such trouble we'll have to undergo for you foolishness! And how will the gods tolerate this, tell me? They too will be polluted, won't they?....'These idiotic Mahar women! Hey you, why do you bring these brats along? They'll touch things and pollute everything. Tell them to sit quietly'....Finally, the kaki would throw from above, to avoid any contact, a couple of coins on each palm. The same process was followed while selling grass as well. The kaki would get the women to carefully check each blade of grass!

(PWB 55-56)

Thus, Dalits were not allowed touch any upper caste people's property. In schools, girls too treated the Mahar children like lepers. Whenever the upper caste girls pass by the Mahar girls, the upper caste girls would say, "chee," "chee:"

....The higher caste girls would hurl taunts and abuses at us, 'These Mahar girls put on such airs. They have even touched the taps! Now where should we drink water from? Stupid things!'....The higher

caste girls also got together to surround us. They would hurl insults at us, 'That Ambedkar has educated himself, that's why these dirty Mahars are showing off! That filthy Mahar, Ambedkar, eats dead animals but look at the airs he gives himself!'

(PWB 108-109)

Though the Mahar girls got the opportunity to access schools, they were not allowed by the upper caste people. Dalit students were assaulted and discriminated. Babasaheb Ambedkar was their target, and the Dalit mass. It is the religious faith and attitude which maintains traditional hegemony.

Baby Kamble remembered the details of the social issues with simple language. The upper caste teachers placed the Dalit children away from black-board vision. During break hours, Dalit girls were not allowed to drink water from pot and tap. Sometimes, the saravna girls beat the innocent Dalit girls. It is the Laws of Manu that:

In childhood a female must be subjected to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her son; a woman must never be independentThough destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure (elsewhere), or avoid of good qualities, (yet) a

husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife...(qtd. in Basharat 243)

Baby Kamble got tremendous faith and encouragement from Ambedkar's public speeches. She also claimed Dalits' and women's rights. She began to achieve the liberation of her people through intellectual writing and activities. Kamble's mother never went any gathering. On behalf of her mother, Kamble used attend any meeting for social development. Once a meeting was held in a hall, all the chairs were occupied by upper caste women:

....They would not allow the Mahar women to sit on the chairs. Helpless, our women stood on one side. At the same time, the rani sahib started to move towards the stage, accompanied by her other followers Godbole, Velankar and Bhadkamkar. Our Thakubai rushed forward. She shook the rani by her shoulder and told her, 'Your women are not allowing our women to sit on the chairs. Our Ambedkar has told us to demand our rights. I am going to forcefully remove your women from the chairs and seat my women there.' The Rani Sahib was taken aback for a moment. But she immediately arranged chairs in the front for all of us.(PWB 133)

Baby Kamble drew the attention towards gender discrimination. Her sense of self, idea, and beliefs were afresh and burning. They are properly brought out at the correct time by her parents but by Ambedkar.

Mahar women used to wake up at the crack of dawn. The grains would have been cleaned the previous night and kept ready. The honour enjoyed by a family was in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house. Baby Kamble father Pandharinath kept her mother in the house as a caged bird. Women should clean their huts, and polish the floor and walls with cow or buffalo dung. Usually, Dalit women dedicate their lives to do services to the family members. Whenever a woman gives birth to a baby, she has to tie up her bellies and lie down helplessly. A Mahar woman would continue to give birth as long as possible.

Hungry stamped on the Dalits and particularly Dalit women. They would eat the fruits of cactus shrubs, when there was no food. Baby Kamble portrays the treatment of children with gender priority, "Mahar women would go out begging in the neighbourhood and try to collect at least a handful of grains..." (PWB 57). Jena Sasmita, in her article "The Practice of Female Foeticide and Infanticide among Sheduled Caste Population in India," says:

The decline in child sex ration shows shortage of female per thousand males. The shortage, in

general, has increased over time. The shortfall in the population of the age group 0-6 years is more than the shortfall in the total population. It is possible that the living and social conditions in and outside the family have deteriorated, leading to relatively more female deaths. Those conditions relate to social, nutritional, and the health status of females, poor health facilities, gender discrimination and educational and economic status of women. (52)

In general, Hinduism opposes the basic civil rights of the female clan. *Vedas*, the law of classic religion, is tragically hostile to its women no matter what caste. According to the *Vedas*, women happen to be a mere sex consolation and are subject to atrocities. Thus, the law book ignored all kinds of women's welfare. Baby Kamble also brought out the historical faith on "child-marriage" as social issue. Besides caste problems, child-marriage, and suttee [sati] exist as holy rituals in religion. But, they are injustices to women as a whole. At the earliest, the young girls will be daughters-in-law at the age of eight or nine:

On the day of the marriage, the bride would be given her bridal sari to wear. The little girl would feel like she was drowning in that sari. The

groom would be dressed in a thick coarse dhoti and khadi jacket, with a huge turban on his head. He would resemble a scarecrow perfectly...(PWB 89)

Mahar women should endure the child marriage as soon as they reach maturity. The poor daughters-in-law would tremble like a leaf. Sometimes, there will be beating and torture. Besides this, a few women would be subject to chopping off the nose by the mother-in-law. Many innocent women would be humiliated by their mothers-in-law. Such stupid inhuman discriminations were practiced by same people until 1940s. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says in her article, "Discussion: An Afterword on the New Subaltern, "Are men and women different here? Only in so far as some indefinite thing called tribal "culture" has started to resemble the class-mobility patterns the non-tribal poorer classes" (329).

Under these circumstances, Baby Kamble was married off at the age of thirteen. Her in-laws were also from Phaltan. Life became very easy for Baby Kamble. She actively involved in the Dalits' social welfare. With the influence of Ambedkar, she started a school in the name of Mahatma Phule Dnyan Vikas Prasarak Sanstha. She is, however, a subaltern Dalit woman. The Indian fundamentalists are not ready to change the attitude towards women; rather, they were ready to kill them. Most Indians view marriage as a mere a contract based on economic power. The transition from tradition to

modernity necessitated to think about the restructuring of the religions of India.

Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* contains various unexplored Dalit elements. Extreme poverty, humiliation, and rage of upper caste people are portrayed with fresh and depressive memories. It strikes the readers with anger, passion, and inspires the self-confidence. Siddalingaiah narrates the real social conditions to the world about the caste dominated society in India. His voice triumphs over the deprivations.

Exploitation of innocent and weaker sections had been a common phenomenon in India. In spite of his eagerness in education, poverty haunted him. He describes the pitiable conditions of the suppressed community who starve for daily bread:

That was a time of drought everywhere. People had to struggle even for a morsel of food. Some threw ceremonial fests to appease the rain gods. During fests, the Holeyas were made to sit in a corner. We were noticed only after people of the upper castes had been served. I felt contented with whatever little food came my way, and wouldn't think too much about the discrimination. (OKA 7)

The centuries old caste hidden apartheid has been denying the basic rights to Dalits. As a result, they are forced to live a neglected life and carry out the traditional roles without

proper welfare. It was the leftover that was generally given to Dalit people by the upper class instead of wages. *The Constitution of India* ensures gender equality in its preamble as a fundamental right but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women by ways of legislation and policies.

The former "UN Secretary General" Kofi Annan has stated, "Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance" (qtd. in *Women Development Wing*). There is a need for new kinds of institutions, incorporating new norms and rules that support equal and just relations between women and men. Today, women are organizing themselves to meet the challenges that are hampering their development. The government, police administrators, and concerned authorities often fail to prosecute those who engage in discrimination against Dalits. Very often, the victims do not even lodge complaints. Dalits have no faith towards the administrative and justice system.

Dalits in India, traditionally the recipients of some of India's worst discrimination and oppression, did not have much of a literary voice. Now, however, there are voices representing millions of Dalits – people who certainly do speak for themselves, but many of whom cannot write for

themselves, and would not be published if they did. Evelyn Reed, in her article "Women: Caste, Class or Oppressed Sex" argues that women status with certain societies:

First, women were not always the oppressed or "second" sex. Anthropology, or the study of prehistory, tells us the contrary. Throughout primitive society, which was the epoch of tribal collectivism, women were the equals of men and recognized by man as such. Second, the downfall of women coincided with the break-up of the matriarchal clan commune and its replacement by class-divided society with its institutions of the patriarchal family, private property and state power. (15)

In Indian society, woman is used to clean unwanted things, grind corn, gather fuel, tend to the fields, bathe younger siblings, and prepare meals. Most of the families can not afford modern appliances, so her tasks must be done by hand—crushing corn into meal with heavy rocks, scrubbing laundry against rough stones, kneading bread and cooking gruel over a blistering open fire. There is no time left in the day to learn to read and write or to play with friends. She collapses exhausted each night, ready to wake up the next morning to start another long workday.

Thus, Siddalingaiah's family migrated to the slum of Bangalore and established social networks. By his hard work and the influence of Periyar and Ambedkar, he got some transition in his poverty devastated life. As Artis, et al., say "Dalit children, being disproportionately poor, most heavily suffer the ills of an inequitable and ineffective education system in India" (14). Education helps to break out Dalits' de facto poverty and caste distress. But they are treated with substandard ideas. They still drink dirty or impure water, and the government ignores the derogatory life of Dalits. Siddalingaiah mourns a caste incident in his college life:

A lecturer used to feel thirsty in class. He would give me the key to his Godrej almirah and ask me to fetch water. I would do as told. He was very orthodox. Why he still chose me to fetch water became a subject of discussion in class. He had mistaken me for a Lingayat. I was liberated from the task of fetching water after he came to know my caste. (OKA 75)

Today caste remains preeminent factors in India. As long as neighbours are not aware of a person's caste, a Dalit is safe and things will be fine. The moment they find out the caste, particularly that of Dalithood, everything changes. Dalits are emerging as an indispensable force in India today. They

spread over the entire country, speak many languages, and belong to many religions. Despite the fact that they are playing a decisive role in shaping India's future, Dalits continue to face certain problems in the name of caste. Bhagwan Das comprehends the livelihoods of Dalits today: "A professor, a lawyer, a doctor, an architect born in untouchable family is considered inefficient and inferior without even seeing his performance" (58).

In *Karukku*, Bama was very particular towards the beauty of her place and village. As a narrator, she classifies and describes the structure of her village. Her memories on the settlement reveals that she was really a representative of her community and era. The village is constituted according to the caste. Most of the commercial movements were established in the mainstream society. Dalits were exclusively separated and put in filthy enclaves:

....I don't know how it came about that the upper-caste communities and the lower caste-communities were separated like this into different parts of the village....The post-office, the panchayat board, the milk-depot, the big shops, the church, the schools - all these stood in their streets....Besides, there was a big school in the Naicker street which was meant only for the upper-caste children. (*Karukku* 6)

The political and cultural philosophy may be that no government offices or institutions should be built in the Dalits' settlement. Her conscious on the governments' institution shows that Dalits were ignored from government affairs as a whole. When Bama was studying in the third standard, she has seen the discriminations in her locality. She saw an elderly man carries a package without touching it.

Since the Dalits are not allowed to touch the property of upper caste men. But Dalits' subjugation and humbleness are expected by the upper caste people. When Bama was returning home from school holidays, a Naicker woman sat besides her in the bus seat. The woman asked Bama's village and street name. She replied "Cheri" (*Karukku* 18). Immediately, the Naicker woman moved off to another seat. Thus, the layers of caste discriminations separated people. When Dalits identity revealed for liberation, immediately they are humiliated:

....He came along, holding out the packet by its string, without touching it. I stood there thinking to myself, if he holds it like that, won't the package come undone, and the vadai fall out?

The elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand that held the string with his other hand.

Naciker opened the parcel and began to eat the vadais. (*Karukku* 13)

Later, Bama came to understand that she and her communities were prohibited by Hinduism, but cursed to remain as poor, cloth washer, cobbler, cleaning dead animals, carrying death news, grave digging, and drumbeat announcer.

Bama lights on an incident that took place in her college hostel. That incident has been piercing her heart into pieces. She made a request to the warden for availing leave for her brother Raj Gautaman's communion on genuine grounds (Bama's interview *Outlook*). Her plea was rejected. Whereas, the warden willingly granted leave for the upper caste students without any query. As an educated girl, Bama argued with the school authorities with a vibrant voice: "...there cannot be different rules for different castes, only the same rules for everyone" (19). At last, she won justice; she went home. As Raj Kumar, in his *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*, said:

The lives of the Parayas entirely depended upon the mercy of the Naickers. If Naicker families did not call them for any agricultural labour then they would go up to the woods on the mountains, and make a living by gathering firewood and selling it. Either way their earnings were mirage. Poverty was rampant in Dalit families. (233-34)

Bama completed the nun training admits of various caste discriminations in Christian institutions. She worked in the same Christian school in which wealthy and Dalits students. In that school, Dalit children were used for menial works:

In that school, attended by pupils from very wealthy households, people of my community were looking after all the jobs like sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms, and cleaning out the lavatories. And in the convent, as well, they spoke very insultingly about low-caste people. They spoke as if they didn't consider low-caste people as human beings. They didn't know that I was a low-caste nun...(Karukku 22)

As Raj Kumar said, "a majority of Dalit women live in rural areas amidst poverty and backwardness....Majority of Dalit women are daily wage labourers, agricultural workers, servants and unskilled workers"(217). Bama remembers her experience as a farm worker. Even though Bama went to school, she worked as a labourer for daily wages to meet her expenses. There is also double vessels system. Dalits were asked to stand away from the vessels of the Nacikers when they give leftovers:

...I knew I should not touch their goods or chattels; I should never come close to where they were, I should always stand away to one side. These

were their rules. I often felt pained and
ashamed... (Karukku 46)

Even women from Bama's street were forbidden. Bama gives important to women identity as a mirror. Women are more vulnerable to the assault by upper caste people, and were restricted from certain freedom. They were not allowed to see movies, or walk in the streets with an open face. If any woman moves freely, she will be humiliated, assaulted, sometimes raped by upper caste men. As Anjabai Derhbhrator, who attended the Nagpur conference of the "All India Women's Conference" (AIWC) in 1938, comments:

The *saravna* sister's behaviour towards their untouchable sisters was distant, cold, mean and lowly attitude. During the lunch hour, the untouchable women delegates - Jaibai and others - had been asked to sit aside and had felt humiliated. (qtd. in Rege 55)

After graduation, Bama joined as a school teacher in a Christian convent-school where the nuns deliberately oppressed the Dalit children with contempt. In order to put an end to this sort of discriminations, she decided to become a nun with a mission of helping the poor students. She entered a religious order with a great hope: "...why should I not became a nun too and truly help the people who are humiliated so much and kept under such strict control?" (20).

Whenever Bama suffered, her sufferings were aptly juxtaposed with her own people which needs emancipation from the clutches of poverty and untouchability. Her individual sufferings and trauma were interwoven with the problems of Dalit population.

As she wanted to serve the Dalits, Bama embraced Christianity. The reason behind mass conversion is to safeguard Dalits from the cruel injustice, discriminations, humiliations, and caste bias of the Hindu religion. Dalits think that Christianity would treat them gently. Quite surprisingly, Bama found discriminations in the Christianity also. They labelled her as Dalit-Christian.

Wherever Dalits go for shelter, they find no other refuge. There is a perennial search for social freedom. Bama tolerated the caste discriminations. In spite of the obstacles, she successfully completed nun-training with a strong will. At the end of the training, a nun-sister said "...in certain orders they would not accept Harijan women as prospective Nuns and that there was even a separate order for them somewhere" (*Karukku* 22). Bama wanted to mitigate the sufferings of the downtrodden from the clutches of a caste ridden society. She thought that the only weapon which annihilates the casteist society is "education and writing."

In the new convent-school, Bama felt really sad about the pathetic conditions of Dalit workers. They have been

treated as stray dogs in that school. She had been assigned more work in the school. She carried out all the assigned work and proved her intellectual skills which are quite opposite to the notion, "...we have no moral discipline, cleanliness, and culture" (23).

Bama completed her B.Ed. degree and began to work in a Christian institution where she saw discrimination towards Dalit children. She came across works of social workers and got influenced to serve her people. Bama also read about the woman who made services to poor. The woman might be Blessed Mother Teresa (1910 -1997). It is the writers' sense of motive and "ethos" of *Karukku*:

....Before my decision, I had read about the woman who founded that particular order, how she had done so for the sake of the poor and lowly; lived and died for them alone. I wanted to be like her, living only for the poor and downtrodden; so I entered that particular order...(Karukku 20-21)

In the convent-school, children of wealthy families were given more privileges. Whereas, Dalit children were crushed by the upper caste nuns and teachers. Bama's psyche is fully disturbed by these bitter experiences which are yet to heal:

...my mind was disturbed. My conscience was battered and bruised. At last I asked myself, is

this the life for me? I left the convent and went home, utterly weary and dispirited. (*Karukku* 67)

Bama's experiences make an authentic communication to the readers of the world community about the treatment of Dalits in India. Her way of expression of her community gives an unique authenticity to Dalit writings. The caste and gender based bitter experiences made Bama to lose faith in God. Both Christian and Hindu institutions mocked, marginalized, humiliated, and ostracized her. She also observed that there was no genuine love in churches and schools for the poor. But, the nuns claim that: "God's love is limitless, subject to no conditions" (*Karukku* 92). Gandhiji also stated that Harijans are "Children of God" (Gianni Sofri 109). If that be so, why do the caste Hindus prevent the Dalits from entering into the sanctum of the temples?

Similarly, in the Churches, the innocent Dalits were skilfully exploited by the Christian missionaries. Christianity says that all should be loved, but it discriminates the Dalit Christians. Since Dalits got refuge in Christianity for better treatment, there too Dalits were discriminated. The upper caste people would keep on say:

How can we allow these people to come into our houses?....There is nothing we can do for these creatures. And we shouldn't do anything for them...

Why do illiterate people need all these things?

(*Karukku* 99-100)

The Nadar community runs a school in which teachers were recruited. Bama applied for this post. She got an interview by answering an advertisement for the post of a teacher. She also wrote a test and attended the interview. But the issue here was that only a Nadar woman was appointed:

....In any case, I didn't get that job. Why?

Because I am a Dalit. It was a school that is governed and run by Nadar. It seems they only appoint Nadar women....They marginalize all of us Dalits as being of poor quality. Amongst all this, it is a real dilemma where and how I can find a job and survive. (*Karukku* 101-102)

Bama experienced the discrimination at village, bus, church, nun's convent, hostel, recruitment, and work places. These institutions' attitude is that Dalits should not be given opportunity to improve from the cursed identity. However, Bama brings out here the attitude of upper caste Indian to the world. It can be traced that Bama's suffering is the suffering of Dalits that remains unchanged throughout India. She comprehends that Dalits have been forced to live a life of humiliation, and degradation until death.

The construction of subjectivity in her autobiography reflects her desire to re-establish the wounded Dalit

population. One may not make a concrete resolution for the caste discriminations. There is a deep and underlying connection between Bama and the Dalit population. Bama converted her personal sufferings into words. Her personal experiences of poverty and discriminations are the saddest experiences that form the core of her autobiography *Karukku*. It is the upper caste and wealthy people of India who hold the caste and its principles. Stephen Bufferfiled, in *Black Autobiography in America*, wrote that, "The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group with ties and responsibilities to the other members" (5).

Thus, Bama's individuality is not recognized by Christian and Hindu institutions. That is why the Dalit population started to embrace other religions. Bama rejected both Christianity and Hinduism which shackled her ambitions. Bama has come out with a renewed soul after experiencing the cruelty and injustices caused by the so called caste pride:

.....I feel a certain contentment in leading an ordinary life among ordinary people....Those people who stuck with me in my prosperous days have torn themselves away and gone. A few who heard of my present distress have come to me on the pretext of wishing to help and heal, but have merely stirred the wound; they too have left.....I comfort myself with the thought that rather than live with a

fraudulent smile, it is better to lead a life
weeping real tears. (*Karukku* 104)

Karukku is not a simple sentimental autobiography designed to evoke a sense of empathy from the reader. Rather, Bama wanted *Karukku* to be a source for global forum. The readers are asked to decode the traumas of caste oppressions and injustices upon Dalits. Bama globalized the real traditional character names of Dalits like, "Katterupu son," "Managatti mama." It shows Dalits' aesthetic in calling her community people by their action and behaviour. Whereas, she never used the names of upper caste people; yet she just used caste name like Naicker, Nun, Sister, and Priests in general. While on the one hand *Karukku* challenges the oppressors who have enslaved and disempowered the Dalits, on the other hand, it reiterates the need for an egalitarian society with ideals such as justice, equality, and love:

....Because we are born into the Paraya *jati*, we
are never given any honour or dignity or respect.
We are stripped of all that. But if we study and
make progress, we can throw away these
indignities...(*Karukku* 15)

Bama repeatedly talks about the importance of education for the Dalits. Gradually, Bama's wounded psyche gets remedy from the present day social activists who are vigorously working to castigate the heinous practice of untouchability

that is deeply rooted in the minds of the upper caste. As Sarah Beth, in "Dalit Autobiographies in Hindi: the Transformation of Pain into Resistance," says, "Dalit individual uses his narrative to raise his voice for those who are silenced by caste oppression..." (5).

In *The Scar*, Gunasekaran describes how he and high level Muslim people live in Elayankudi – a big village market place in Ramanathapuram district. As the son of a teacher, Gunasekaran was respected by all Muslim community, and he was given special access into their homes and mosque. Gunasekaran had first felt caste-stratification while studying six, seven, and eight standard. Tracing the caste is a crucial discrimination. In this way, a school clerk would enter the class and ask:

'How many in this class are Parayars?' he would ask. Put up your hands! How many are Pallars? Stand up, I will count. Look, all of you should come to the office after class to pick up your scholarship forms which should be filled up within a week's time....They would reinforce caste identities by labeling us Pallar, Parayars and Chakiliyars...(The Scar 5)

The scholarship application can either be given to the candidate by looking the school-record, or can be sent to home by post. The school clerk did not follow the method; rather,

he came to the class and called "How many Parayars?" Tracing caste happens in all spheres of Indian life, but Dalits are the inevitable victims.

In the early period of boyhood, Gunasekaran recognized caste discrimination. In spite of this, he was respected by his Muslim friends through his mannerism. He was naturally a good singer. The Congress party leader of Tamil Nadu Kamaraj appreciated his voice and offered Gunasekaran the Kalimar brand colour-soda which was served to him. He was allotted to sing prayer and the National Anthem at school. Later he sung in AIR Trichy and became popular as Elayankudi Gunasekarn. His brother, Karunanidhi, enrolled him in the Harijan Hostel for free education.

Every year, when school re-opened, his father would ask some rich Muslims "Jamath" to help towards the cause of Gunasekaran's education. Whenever Gunasekaran needed signature for the scholarship application, the village headman (VAO) used to humiliate him and his father. The headman would ask them to do some works to show their caste superiority before they sign anything:

....If they saw us in the village they would ask us to tie up their cattle, dig out a canal, etc, and only then would they sign the forms. Father would feel frustrated every time he had to approach them for their signature. 'It's horrid,

the way they display their caste superiority
before they sign anything,' he would say.

(*The Scar* 9)

The magnitude of caste superiority has devastated in his boyhood itself. This psychological humiliation made another scar in his heart. It is the prevailing social experience in every corner of India. He also observed the post-independent social conditions and documented them in his autobiography.

Once, Gunasekaran set up a shop with a gift sheet in front of Thovoor School. A person can scratch as many spots as he has paid for. If lucky, he would get a gift. If unlucky, there would be no number. A boy scratched so many spots. He never gave money for them. He planned to cheat Gunasekaran. When he asked the money, the boy said "Get lost Paraya" and begun to run. Gunasekaran chased the boy into the street and house. He yelled and called for his parents. At the same evening, eight upper-caste men came with the boy to Gunasekaran's periamma's (aunt) house. His relatives fell at their feet and requested them to spare him, but the upper-caste men openly insulted:

'How can a fellow from your caste enter the upper caste street? And worse, how dare he enter our house.' 'If the fellow had entered our house without knowing the limitations of his caste, then he must really be very arrogant. Where is he? Let's

tie up his feet and hands, and carry him away,'
they shouted.

I was panic-stricken. (*The Scar* 26)

In the following day, a few upper-caste people entered his colony, and there was no resistance by the Dalits. Rather Dalit people have to be obedient. Konar people gave warning, and Gunasekaran was sent back to Elyangudi to avoid problems.

In school days he did weeding work in farm land to earn money. He purchased second hand cloths for Deepavali. It is the trend of low-caste people economic status in our state. Whenever the irrigation tank has water in it, his grandmother used to take him to catch snails and slugs for their meat. It is Dalit people way of meal, snail, fish, and dry-fish etc. They never ate a full meal especially a decent meal. For that they were discriminated.

One day his grandmother has sent Gunasekaran to a shop at south Keeranoor main-land where Konar people live. He bought cooking oil in a wood-chip bottle and walked back through the fields on either side of a narrow bund – it is usually for the ways of the Dalit people. At that moment, he saw a man coming in the opposite direction. As soon as seeing him, Gunasekaran took one leg off the bund and gave him space to walk. In a hash of moment, a slap went on his cheek. He screamed in pain:

'Look at the cheek of the Paraya boy!' the man spat out, and then went on his way. It took me five minutes to come out of my state of shock. I put the box down and sat on the bund crying.... I started walking back home. I had too many questions with myself. 'Why did that man beat me? What mistake did I do? Why did he call me a Paraya?' I didn't get any answer....The moment she heard the entire story he said, 'See we belong to a Paraya household, and they are Maravars. When men and women of the high caste come, we need to stand at least eight feet away from them. We ought to step aside to give them way. That is why the man has beaten you.'

(*The Scar* 43)

He received various wounds by untouchability and those made everlasting scars in his soul. Dalits had to stay back away from the upper-caste. The pain of both physical and psychological atrocities were documented in his autobiography. We can learn that the use of the abusive "Paraya" is common practice, a way of reducing the poor's sense of self to his destined caste, a form of recognition that doubled as an insult. Most of the months, Gunasekaran used to go Tanjavur. He learnt folk music. After receiving

his M.A., he continued to stage the folk music show to educate his fellow people.

As Lauren Berlant, in the article "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy and Politics," perceptively notes that narratives assume that "the law describes what a person is, and that social violence can be located the way physical injury can be treated" (42). As Sony Stark, in a report, "Visiting the Untouchables of India: Crushing Poverty and Inspiring Beauty," comments on poverty:

India's soaring population still functions within a five-tiered caste system and garbage and recycling efforts are an integral part of it. 'Waste pickers' is a lucrative profession for a Shudra or manual laborers, one class above a Dalit. They earn up to \$3 a day and many ply their trade in major Indian cities. These women take pride in the small pertinence they make, all the while keeping the streets clean and providing a more sustainable environment.

Each task in India is important and the pay scale is determined by where you are in the caste system. This is democracy for India and I'm impressed by the care and diligence they place in their roles. ("Visiting the Untouchables of India: Crushing Poverty and Inspiring Beauty")

Indians might have been known to support black people in eradicating apartheid in South Africa, but they forgot to look at their own backyard where over 260 million people are victims of systematic discrimination. Over a hundred million people are degraded to "manual scavenging," removing and carrying human excreta on their heads. This is the ultimate human tragedy that one can see and witness in India. Dalit writer and activist Meena Kandasamy was outraged about the widespread discriminations in the contemporary India. In the BBC World Service interview, she says, "You realise this is something you should work on, something that has to be changed....It challenges your idea of hope and justice. It challenges your idea of any good future for the country" (Robert Brown, BBC NEWS). Thus, this chapter traced the discourse of caste and gender discriminations and took us to consider Dalits' challenges against the social behaviour of upper caste Indians.

Chapter IV

Atrocities and Trauma

Caste based discriminations and atrocities against Dalits community are common phenomena all over India that lead to bloody and brutal killing of Dalits like Bihar, Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. The severity of violence's against Dalits and its aftermath traumas are beyond any human comprehension. Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and K.A. Gunasekaran autobiographies portrayed the various forms of atrocities and traumas. The upper caste people terrorize Dalit men and women. They were abused, attacked, humiliated, paraded naked, and gang-raped.

The caste based atrocities still persist in the world's largest democracy despite legal safeguards, and the human rights of this group are under a cloud of danger. The caste conflict has long been a historical fact and continues to be an unfortunate feature of contemporary India. Caste denotes a system of rigid social stratification into ranked groups. caste divisions also dominate in housing, marriage, and general social interaction – divisions that are reinforced through the practice and threat of social ostracism, economic boycotts, and even physical violence.

Hillary Mayell, in a report India's "Untouchables" Face Violence, Discrimination," says that:

More than 160 million people in India are considered the Dalit -- "Untouchable." And he emphasised that "...by their birth into *Varna* system that deems Dalits as impure, less than human. Newspapers tell:

1. Dalit boy beaten to death for plucking flowers
2. Dalit tortured by cops for three days
3. Dalit "witch" paraded naked in Bihar
4. Dalit killed in lock-up at Kurnool
5. Dalits burnt alive in caste clash
6. Dalits lynched in Haryana
7. Dalit woman gang-raped, paraded naked
8. Police egged on mob to lynch Dalits.

(National Geographic News)

Smita Narula, a senior researcher with Human Rights Watch, also says "Dalits were not even allowed to drink from the same wells, attend the same temples, wear shoes in the presence of an upper caste, or drink from the same cups in tea stalls" (Caste discrimination). According to the International Dalit Conference (2003) in Vancouver, Canada, there are nearly 90 percent of all the poor Indians and 95 percent of all the illiterate Indians are Dalits. The Dalit

autobiographies were authentic expression of atrocities which were experienced by the authors.

There are a number of tear shedding injustices and atrocities found in Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*. As Pramod K. Nayar says, in his article "Postcolonial Affects: Victim Life Narratives and Human Rights in Contemporary India," Dalit victims are narrating their lives to the world:

Victim life writing here functions as a *claims narrative*. Claims narratives could be those within a court of justice or they could be life narratives that consciously or unconsciously set up "affective communities," making a claim upon us of the readers, demanding an ethical response. Claims narratives remind us of the narrator's identity as humans by showing us brutalized bodies - the narrator is the witness to inhuman context, social event or life. It is by establishing this role of victim, sufferer, the tortured and the inhuman that claims narratives reveal what has been left out of the ambit of Human Rights. (15)

Omprakash, at the opening of *Joothan*, says that Chuhras were not considered as "human." But upper caste people use Chuhra for domestic works like cleaning the toilets, cowshed, and labouring in agricultural farm lands:

Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one [a higher-caste person] happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhra were not seen as human. They were simply things for use. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw them away. (*JUL 2*)

The Children of the Tyagis would tease Omprakash by calling him "Chuhre ka." Sometimes they would beat him for no reason. This was absurd and baseless atrocity. At the age of ten, Omprakash torn by traumas:

....If we went to school in neat and clean clothes, our classmates said, "Abey, Chuhre ka, he has come dressed in new clothes." If we went wearing old and shabby clothes, then they said, "Abey, Chukre ke, get away from me, you stink."

This was our no-win situation. We were humiliated whichever way we dressed. (*JUL 4*)

When he came to class Fourth, the Headmaster Kaliram called on Omprakash and asked him to clean the school, "It is, after all, your family occupation" (*JUL 5*). Based on caste, Kaliram scolded Omprakash as "motherfucker." He cleaned the classrooms and playground for two days. On the third day, he sat in the class for lesson. Kaliram raised his voice:

...."Abey, Chuhre ke, motherfucker, where are you hiding your mother?"

I began to shake uncontrollably. A Tyagi boy shouted, "Master Sahib, there he is, sitting in the corner."

The headmaster pounced on my neck. The pressure of his fingers was increasing. As a wolf grabs a lamb by the neck, he dragged me out of the class and threw me on the ground. He screamed: "Go sweep the whole playground - otherwise I will shove chilis up your ass and throw you out of the school."

(JUL 5-6)

Omprakash narrated everything to his father, and consequently, he was terminated from the school by the headmaster Kaliram. Other Tyagis rejected Omprakash studying at school and said, "What is the point of sending him to school?" But Chowdhuri Sahib recommended Omprakash's study. After completing fifth standard, he was unable to join sixth standard. Meanwhile, Omprakash tended pigs to run his family. His widow sister-in-law Bhabhi gave her silver anklet for the admission of Omprakash, and he continued his study: "I stood first in my section in the half-early examination. The behaviour of some teachers, however, was still unfriendly, they were indifferent and contemptuous of me" (JUL 17).

At the standard of eight, Omprakash read the works of Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938), Munshi (1880-1936), and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). All these writers focused on superstitions, and oppressions of commoners. In the year 1960, there was great flood. It washed away all the clay-made huts. Most of the people and Omprakash family stayed in Mamraj Taga's shed. They ate only "mar": the water in which the rice has been boiled. In following days, Master Sahib taught a lesson about Dronacharya and his poverty – Guru of Pandavas and Kauravas in the epic *Mahabharata*, the episode in the Adiparva section of the immortal epic constituted the "well-known example of the injustice to tribals," said Justices Markandey Katju and Gyan Sudha Mishra (qtd. in Dhananjay Mahapatra). Omprakash asked questions, "So Ashwatthama was given flour mixed in water instead of milk, but what about us who had to drink *mar*, rice water? How come we were never mentioned in any epic?..." (JUL 26). The teacher beaten on the back of Omprakash. He was exploited by the teacher of upper caste.

At the class of eight, Omprakash faced other atrocities. Surajbhan Taga's son Brajesh, out of jealousy, picked up his books at scattered into the bay-mud soil:

....In angry voice he said, "I hear you are clever in your studies." He planted one end of the stick

in my stomach. "Let me also see how bright you are." He was bent on starting a row...

I washed my hand and feet at the school tap and dried the books and notebooks in the sun. My heart felt very heavy that day. It seemed that studying wasn't going to be possible for me. But Pitaji's face and words kept coming back to me: "You have to improve the caste by studying." (*JUL* 32-33)

The newly wed bridegroom and bride should go to the upper caste area to say "*Salaam*." It is imposed on Dalits. One day, Brahmdev Taga's bullock died on the way to the field. Omprakash was summoned by his mother to skin the hide off. He sold the hide and gave the money to his mother, but she said, "....You don't have textbooks. Whatever books this money can buy, buy them. I will somehow manage..." (*JUL* 42). Omprakash did the cleaning the dead animal to buy books. The memory created a vibrant trauma. At this moment, Dalits refused to work without pay:

The Tagas realized that we were slipping from their control. Therefore the moment one of us demanded wages, they would get hopping mad. They were looking for a way to maintain their domination without changing anything....No one in the basti had the courage to ask the head constable why these people were being beaten. What crime had they

committed? This farce went on for an hour. All ten men who had been beaten were groaning with pain. their screams had made the birds in the trees take off, but paralysis had struck the villagers, who could not express their empathy. My mind was filled with a deep revulsion...(JUL 43-45)

National Geographic News says that the statistics compiled by India's National Crime Records Bureau indicate that in the year 2000, the last year for which figures are available, 25,455 crimes were committed against Dalits. "Every hour two Dalits are assaulted; every day three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, and two Dalit homes are torched" ("India's 'Untouchables' Face Violence, Discrimination"). No one believes these numbers are anywhere close to the reality of crimes committed against Dalits. Because the police, village councils, and government officials often support the caste system, which is based on the religious teachings of Hinduism, and many crimes go unreported due to fear of reprisal, intimidation by police, inability to pay bribes demanded by police, or simply the knowledge that the police will do nothing. Narula Smita brings out the facts:

There have been large-scale abuses by the police, acting in collusion with upper castes, including raids, beatings in custody, failure to charge

offenders or investigate reported crimes. That same year, 68,160 complaints were filed against the police for activities ranging from murder, torture, and collusion in acts of atrocity, to refusal to file a complaint. Sixty two percent of the cases were dismissed as unsubstantiated; 26 police officers were convicted in court.

("Caste Discrimination")

Despite the fact that untouchability was officially banned when India adopted its constitution in 1950, discrimination against Dalits remained so pervasive that in 1989 the government passed legislation known as The Prevention of Atrocities Act. The act specifically made it illegal to parade people naked through the streets, force them to eat feces, take away their land, foul their water, interfere with their right to vote, and burn down their homes. Since then, the violence has escalated, largely as a result of the emergence of the grassroots human rights movement among Dalits to demand their rights and resist the dictates of untouchability.

Omprakash lived in a state of chaos and destitution. He is aware of the centuries old subjugation of Dalits. If they protest, they are assaulted and killed. Similarly, Omprakash was assaulted in every sphere of life:

Such were the model teachers that I had to deal with. Moving from childhood to adolescence, when my personality was being shaped, I had to live in this terror-filled environment. How will those who have never suffered the needle pricks of hatred and jealousy feel my pain? Who have never endured humiliation? How will they know what it feels like? Dreams, like sand dunes, do not make a sound when shattered.

At times I feel like I grew up in a cruel and barbaric civilization. (*JUL* 57)

Bhikuram and Omprakash went to the neighbouring village to fetch food-grains and vegetables for their teacher. The teacher's father asked their caste. When they replied "Chuhra caste," the aged man began to beat the two boys. People suggested to tie those Dalit boys in a tree. Fortunately, they escaped the beatings. However, they were humiliated:

Somehow we finished the meal and came out.

Bhikhuram sat down on the cot next to the elder's.

I was standing at a short distance. In the meantime someone else had arrived. The elder extended the hookah pipe to him. As he drew on the hookah, the man asked the elder about us. The moment he heard that we had come from Barla, he fired a question, "What is your caste?"

I answered his question, "We are of the Chuhra caste?

....The old man had lot of strength and Bhikhuram crumbled....Many people suggested that we should be tied to a rope and hung from a tree...(JUL 60-61)

When Omprakash was in the Tenth standard, he experienced a great humiliation. He was the first student of his caste, not just from his "basti" but from the entire province. Fauz Singh Tyagi came to Dalit Vasti and called Omprakash to sow sugarcane:

Fauz Singh Tyagi, whom everyone in the village called Fauza, came and stood before me, a huge staff on his shoulder. He said, "Abey, Chuhre, what are you doing?"

"I am taking the board exams. Tomorrow I have to do the math test," I replied in a low voice.

"Study at night. Come with me. I have to sow sugarcane," Fauza ordered. I told him repeatedly that I had to study for my test the next day, but he was adamant. He held me by the elbow and dragged me to his field...(JUL 66)

Omprakash received various "cuts" in the name of caste. He was then the last year of his intermediate programme. His chemistry master Brajpal Singh deliberately kept out of lab experiment:

...I began to feel certain that I was being kept out deliberately. I asked him, "What have I done? Have I damaged anything?" But Brajpal didn't bother to reply.

When I told Ram Singh of my problem, he suggested that I go and meet the principal. The principal, Yashveer Tyagi, heard me attentively. He assured me that he wouldn't let anything happen to me....When the results were announced, I was among the failures. I had good marks in all other subjects except chemistry. I had failed the lab tests.

(JUL 76)

Omprakash missed his childhood, extra curricular activities, and higher studies. Thus, the teachers' injustices to the Dalits are enormous. Yet, he understood the treacheries of upper caste teachers and he continued to struggle forever.

After employment in the Ordnance Factory Training Institute (OFTI) in Khamaria, Omprakash was scolded with filthy word "Sohare," father-in-law, by his higher-officer Mr. Gupta. The government officer assaulted Omprakash by the word "Abey sohare" it pierced the heart of Omprakash:

....Seeing Barla, Muzaffarnagar, as my permanent address, his anger and surprise had burst out together: "Abey, sohare, he has got this far!"

I felt that his way of speaking to me was unjust....After we left Gupta's office, he said, You are in training right now. These people want you to take a wrong step so that they can throw you out of the institute. Learn to recognize their traps. (*JUL* 144)

Omprakash was trapped everywhere by his caste. He has been stung by uncounted upper caste scorpions. His suffering is greater than Macbeth's innocence (*Macbeth* 3.2.1-37), and King Lear's disappointments in the storm because of the ungrateful daughters (*King Lear* 3.2.1-62). No way inferior to those great characters, Omprakash had been facing all sorts of discrimination, injustices, atrocities, and humiliation. The more he developed, the more he experienced trauma. Caste plays a very important role in the Indian society. As soon as a person is born, caste determines his or her destiny. As Pramond K. Nayar says:

Valmiki is the living witness, with the atrocities inside him. The witness here is involved in a *performance*, without always perceiving the full implications of the atrocity s/he witnessed. We witness this *performance* by a witness...For the 'performer' (the primary witness, the Dalit atrocity victim), it is a repeat-trauma: the act of remembering the atrocity itself. But it is also a

political performance because it initiates a process that opens up the wound (i.e., trauma) in the culture itself for viewing. The open wound is marked within language itself. For instance, Valmiki writes in his preface that 'a lot has remained unsaid. I did not manage to put it all down. It was beyond my power.' (59)

In *Growing up Untouchable in India*, Vasant Moon portrays his fellow-man Maniram. He is from the Mahar community. He dares to wrestle match with the Cowherds. Whenever Maniram is at the peak of victory, there will be a quarrel. Upper caste people and wrestlers began to insult Mahars in words. Then preplanned quarrels would appear between the Dalits and the upper castes. In school, Master Dev abused Vasant Moon on several occasions. One of the curses is that "Moon will fail in matric:"

Dev Master was the teacher for English grammar in the sixth standard. One day Dev Master gave me a curse: "Moon, you cannot pass matric for ten years." There were fluent English-speakers like Kshirsagar, Patwardhan, Tambe, and Buche as students in my class. However in that year, 1949, I easily passed the matric examination, while expert English speakers like Kshirsagar were not even found in the list of results. (GUI 38)

The word and slang of the upper caste people are awkward, but in the light of caste they are good. Dalits are receivers of words like, "cunt," "phallus" and [a slang for vulva] and beatings, but upper caste men and women considered Dalits as polluted human beings. There were clashes between communities over a playground ownership.

In 1946, Nagpur city was buzzing with movements. It was a time when the Hindu-Mahar riots happened, "Because Hindus dominated the police and other departments, whenever there arose the slightest sign of a riot, Mahar youth were put under house arrest..." (GUI 93). The upper caste Government officers never like Dalits' development and they are also not ready to protect them from the atrocities of upper caste people.

During election, Nagpur was heated with rivalry between Congress and Ambedkarite community:

The election atmosphere in Nagpur became heated. A huge poster was pasted at Timki, proclaiming, "Maharonkee khun ke holi khelenge!" (We will play holi with the blood of Mahars!). Due to the sentiment asserting "Congress rule is our rule," On 3 May 1946, the Weavers and Farmers united and decided to attack. Five thousand thugs, with cudgel, spears, and swords in hand, left for Golibar Square with the aim of attacking the Mahar

settlement at Indora....Two young Ambedkar girls with their life at stake and no men in the house - still they decided to face the situation. The police showed no sign of leaving. The women said, "There is no one in the house." The police said, "Come up on the roof..." (GUI 96-98)

Due to caste unrest in Mahar settlement, Vasant escaped to Bardi and stayed with Radhabai Kamle (a Dalit women activist). Police began to molest Dalit women. The police drew the women to the roof and revenged by molestation. However, Dalit women resistant to hold dignity and loyalty towards their family members. Vasant Moon is still targeted by a thug [paid rowdy] Atkya. Baru, a fruit seller, overheard the plan and alerted Waman and Vasant Moon:

'Waman, get up! Atkya is coming with some people. Run!' she yelled. I got up and ran out in no time. Beside us was a big canal...."After that I reached Cameltown. There I stayed for three or four months." (GUI 101)

The arrested Dalits were taken to Nagpur jail, and they were fed half-cooked rice of extremely inferior quality and watery lentil soup smelling of bad oil. They held a food "satyagraha" from 19 to 26 September 1946 inside the jail. The jail police made a *lathi* charge on them. Many women and

men were wounded. Police custody atrocities on Dalits were another omnipresent legal injustice in India.

These kinds of assaults and killing are found in his contemporary India during 1970s. Sharad Pawar, Maharashtra Chief Minister announced the change of Marathwada University to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University in Aurangabad. Upper caste people were immediately provoked and widespread uproar began. Government properties were burnt and huge mobs directed against the Dalit settlements and about 900 houses were brunt down. Vasant portrays them with authentic description.

Vasant recalled that a few months later on 30 January 1948, Mahatma Gandhi (1869 -1948) was assassinated. The killer was a Maharashtrian "Brahmin," not only was a ban imposed on the Rashitriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to which the assassin is belonged. At the same time, Dalit's interests, and Bhausahab Madkholkar's *Tarun Bharat* press were attacked and also set on fire. Kathleen Kerr, in the article, "Race, Nation, and Ethnicity" states that Dalits are displaced by atrocities and burning of huts:

Any attempt to stabilize ethnic, racial, or national identity crumbles under the pressure of multiple and mobile interfaces. Postmodern hybridity is also generated in the articulations of difference marked by nation, class, gender,

sexuality, and language, and the process of translating across gaps which is characteristic of diasporas. (379)

Above all, Vasant Moon was a practical witness to caste discriminations and atrocities in central India. His experiences are lessons for Dalit men and women.

Baby Kamble, in *The Prisons We Broke*, portrays the atrocities made on Dalits. Dalit women were tortured by both upper caste and fellow men and women. But the word of the upper caste people made a great trauma in the heart of Dalits people of Maharwada of Veergaon. Kamble recalls the upper caste shop owner's word, "Chabu, hey you can't you see the dirty Mahar woman standing there? Now don't you touch her. Keep your distance" (PWB 14).

Mahar women's economic sources depend on selling firewood to the upper caste. They wore saris with stitched patches. They were supposed to hide the borders under the pleats. The upper caste women alone wore a fair dress. In these circumstances, Mahar women collected the firewood and carried to upper caste residents. The Mahar woman should stand far off the platform and check the bundle thoroughly for any hair or blood stain. The Brahmin woman would give the money in a indifferent manner – putting coins above the hand level. The Mahar tradition is that if a woman speaks with her cousin or any other man, her nose will be cut off and driven

out of her husband's house with blood pouring from the mutilation. The mother-in-law and father-in-law were very harsh towards their new daughter-in-laws.

Baby Kamble suffered a lot during her school life. She was assaulted by her upper caste class-mates and teachers. Dalit girls too felt thrilled by the upper caste students and teachers. Despite, the caste consciousness, which had been dormant so far, was now awakened:

....Our school was predominantly high caste. A majority of girls in our class belonged to the higher castes. For the first time in their lives, they had girls like us - who could pollute them - studying with them. They treated us like lepers, as if our bodies dripped with dirty blood or as if pus oozed out of our rotten flesh. If they had to pass by us, they would cover their nose, mutter 'chee, chee', and run as if their lives were in mortal danger. The teacher had allotted us a place in a corner near the door from where we could not move till school was over for the day....We were greatly emboldened by Baba's brave spirit. We, seven or eight friends, would move together as one person. The higher caste girls would hurl taunts and abuses at us, 'These Mahar girls put on such airs. They

have even touched the taps! Now where should we drink water from? Stupid things!’

Another one would come up with, ‘You know, I have to bathe again after I go home from school...

(PWB 108)

Baby Kamble was influenced by Ambedkar and his news paper *Bahishkrut*. She also participated in several protests to claim Dalits’ rights. Once, Ambedkar organised a temple entry. As a precaution, Brahmin surrounded the idol of Viththal from Mahars’ touching-pollution. The fiery Dalits including Anand Ahiwale dashed the Brahmins mob and touched the idol. In the following days, Brahmin priests organized and chanted for about two weeks to restore the original purity from the face of Lord Viththal:

Baba would exhort us in public meetings, ‘We should learn to do business. The high caste in the village will not buy milk from us. In fact, they will not buy anything from us. Undeterred, we should practice business in our own locality. We should not allow the village to earn at our expense.’

(PWB 133)

Baby Kamble followed the alternative source of sustenance towards religions. She committed herself towards Dalits’ social welfare. Besides, she gathered news from a series of meetings and conveyed them to her uneducated people.

Attending meeting was Baby Kamble's main activity. As Nathaniel Roberts, in the article "Language, Violence and the State: Writing Tamil Dalits," says:

Nor is it possible to gain any clear picture of the extent of violence against Dalits in the state's predominantly rural society. For despite India's SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, which is designed to provide Dalits special protection against hate crimes, police have proven highly reluctant to register cases against perpetrators. Thus even assuming Dalit victims gather the courage to report abuses by locally powerful caste groups, their complaints are frequently suppressed; official records thus grossly underestimate the problem. The non-registration of cases under the Atrocities Act, however, merely continues a long-standing police practice of delaying and even outright refusing to file 'first information reports' (FIRs) in cases of attacks on Dalits, while vigorously pursuing false cases foisted upon them by village oppressors.(7)

The social disability of Dalits was made out of religions. The upper caste people had been trying their best to keep the caste system as fresh as possible. It is from here that Dalits were used as village and domestic servants and forced

to perform scavenging, carrying death matters to upper caste people. As P.W. Purushotham and P. Prameela Margaret, in the article, "Dalits and Non-Dalits: A Study of Anantapur District of Andhra Pradesh," say that, "Dalits were not just denied entry into the temples. They were not even allowed to stand in the premises of the temple. Their mere touch and shadow were considered polluting" (22).

In *Ooru Keri*, there are several anecdotal evidences of upper caste people's hostility towards Dalits. The social envy based on caste is an unusual emotion to upper caste people. Siddalingaiah's house was the last in the colony. Children climbed on top of the squat wall and peered into the distance for a glimpse of their parents returning from work. As a small boy, one day, Siddalingaiah saw something strange:

....A man has fastened a yoke onto the shoulders of two others, and was ploughing Ainoru's fields, while the third followed them swinging a whip and making them plough. A strange agony gripped me the moment I realised that one of the men carrying the yoke was my father. Some women who came to where we were standing and sighed, "What a plight has befallen poor Dyavanna!" This doubled my agony. When Appa returned home after toiling like a bullock all day, Avva heated some oil and smeared it on his shoulders. (OKA 2)

As Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany say "In comparable cases of endemic conflict over wages, social exploitation and land use, there are more likely to be 'Harijan Atrocities' than magnificent resolutions" (73). Siddalingaiah was struck by the light of poverty, atrocity, and caste. The expressions he showed towards his father is really pathetic. The poverty brought several misfortunes to his family. His father was often beaten by the money lenders:

My father become a huge debtor. Bringing loans was, to him, as easy as drinking water. But he found it very hard to repay them. One day two toughs beat him on the street. He was wailing and trying to escape. He was injured all over his body and his clothes were torn. The toughs were agents of the moneylender. They had assaulted my father because he hadn't repaid a loan in time...(OKA 37)

It can be remembered that in Belgaum, Karnataka, October 1985, Holeyas (Dalits) staged a "Dharna" or sit-in protest outside the Tashidlar's office for relocation of the Dalit settlement. The District Commissioner saw the Jain landlords' domination and helped the Holeyas under the land reform legislation from the control of Hindu people. With these kinds of influences, Siddalingaiah organised a rationalists' conventions at the hockey field of Central College with objectives of a casteless, and classless society. In his

personal interview, Siddalingaiah also suggested, "Dalit researcher should fight and write to bring equal society which is classless and casteless" (Personal Interview, 8 Feb 2012):

A few had come to spoil the convention....When I was saying that the caste system should be destroyed, one of the spoilers asked, "Where is caste?" To that a student from our side asked whether they were willing to let their girls marry outside their caste. Outraged, the opponents assaulted whoever they could lay their hands on. They used knives, daggers....All those who were dark got beaten up then. One of my Veerashiva friend was dark. The opponents hit him despite his pleading that he was a Veerasaiva. His clothes tore, and they felt sorry when they saw that he was wearing a sivalinga and had spoken the truth.

(OKA 93-94)

All the black skinned people were attacked. Even an upper caste man with dark skin, Siddalingaiah's friend, was also beaten. Later, Siddalingaiah started *Dalit Sangharsha Samiti* (DSS) in Bangalore. In many places, Dalits were assaulted but no First Information Record (FIR) was filed in the police station.

Siddalingaiah brought out the pitiable conditions of the suppressed community. He also starved for daily bread, "....We were noticed only after people of the upper castes had been served. I felt contented with whatever little food came my way, and wouldn't think too much about the discrimination" (OKA 7). His uncle, Gangamalagaiah a school dropped out Dalit, motivated him to write poetry. He earned money through oratory skills. One day, his grandmother took him to a wedding; unfortunately his hand brushed against the clothes of an upper caste man. The man was outraged with anger. Fortunately, his grandmother saved him from the wrath of the upper caste man. As a penance, she commanded him to say "Namaskara Swami" (OKA 15). Thereafter, Siddalingaiah learnt the power of the upper caste.

Siddalingaiah joined the Karnataka Association and was elected as Joint Secretary. He founded a society called Vicharavadi Parishat and visited all Dalit hostels in and around Bangalore. The association brought out the problems of hygiene food, etc. He demonstrated the plight of Dalits to the Government of Karnataka. The then Chief Minister of Karnataka, Shri Devaraj Urs, agreed to increase the scholarship amount, and ordered to renovate the Dalit hostels. As years rolled, he considered learning to read and write are the first step toward self-empowerment. Thus, the tragic anecdotes from Siddalingaiah's autobiography provide a

deeper insight into the exploitation of Dalits and their emancipation. Though he was a revolutionary poet, Siddalingaiah was popularly remembered through his autobiography. He says, "they [Dalits] remember me with the tragic episodes from *Ooru Keri*" (Personal Interview).

In *Karukku*, Bama portrays the insults received by Bama since her childhood. She laments and weeps out of agony. The range of caste discriminations. Those traumas were never be expressed in a fair language. As she felt:

There were only a few days left for us to finish our training and to become fully-fledged nuns....I wished I could have disappeared from that spot and vanished then and there. I lamented inwardly that there was no place that was free of caste....And in the convent, as well, they spoke very insultingly about low-caste people. They spoke As if they didn't even consider low-caste people as human beings...(Karukku 22)

Bama expresses a desperate urge to break, throw away, and destroy the bonds of imperfect social structure. The driving forces that shape her thoughts and writings are the numerous upper caste people's social teaching that occurred in her life. She admits the rootlessness in life, social stratification, and the trauma within her. However, she

challenges hostility and shares them with her reader to make a change. Bama says:

In this society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death....If you are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle. People screw up their faces and look at us with disgust...even if we are as good as they [upper caste] are, or even better, because of this one issue of caste alone, we are forced to suffer pain and humiliation. (*Karukku* 23-24)

When Bama was eleven years old, she saw skirmishes between Parayar and Chaakliyar community. Over the burial cemetery, they fought each other. In spite of all the discriminations and insults, Bama was optimistic in life. She wished to live in this society that disregards her and her community. In the act of remembering the anecdotes of insults and oppression, she constructs her "self" in opposition to hegemonic and orthodox caste conventions to educate her fellow men and women:

So for some time there was an uneasy kind of peace. But a few days later, as Monangi's son was standing at the oil shop, buying something, a number of Pallar boys joined together and beat him up....Just when it seemed that the hostilities were abating a

bit, a few Pallar caught hold of a Paraya boy who had gone into the woods, hacked at him anyhow, and buried him then and there....After that the police came, dragged away the boys from both castes to the police station, shoved them in jail and locked them up. The case still goes on...(Karukku 40-41)

India being a poor country, it is unable to support the Dalits with adequate aids. Non-governmental organization run schools for destitute children. The fact is that, the poor people are ill-treated. They give due importance to only the upper caste staff and employees. They promise Dalits and the Indian government to bring out the changes in the lives of the untouchable communities. But they also exploit the already-deprived community in all means:

Besides the usual lessons, they could have educated the Dalit children in many matter, and made them aware of their situation in the world about them. But instead, everything they said to the children, everything in the manner in which they directed them suggested, that this was the way it was meant to be for Dalits; that there was no possibility of change...(Karukku 89)

The teachers and the priests in the Christian institutions learnt the principles of religions and the value of humanity. But they never follow them in the case of

Dalits. Bama was assaulted, abused and humiliated by the Headmaster. He also gave astringent criticism about her caste, "You have shown us your true nature as a Paraya," (Karukku 16). Bama was further accused of stealing coconut. Then the matter was reported to the school Correspondent. He was also the village Priest. His pronouncement made her further humiliating, "....After all you are from 'Cheri' You might have done it" (Karukku 17). The truth was remembered by Christophe Jaffrelot that the British introduced strong critique of the Indian caste system and established schools and religious missions for transformation:

The British-run schools, which in theory at least were open to them, proved to be inaccessible because the parents of upper caste pupils opposed their admission. At best, Untouchables followed the classes from the veranda. (11)

Bama considered her suffering as the suffering of her people. She began to voice on behalf of her people. Thus, Bama's suffering always related to "self" and "selves." The unjust accusation and humiliating comments taught her the first lessons of degraded Dalits' existence. Bama's psyche is fully disturbed by these bitter experiences which are yet to heal: "....My mind was disturbed. My conscience was battered and bruised. At last I asked myself, is this the life for me?

I left the convent and went home, utterly weary and dispirited" (*Karukku* 67).

All these bitter experiences made Bama to lose faith in God. Both Christian and Hindu institutions mocked, marginalized, humiliated and ostracized her. She also observed that there was no genuine love in Churches and schools for the poor. But, her nuns claimed that: "God's love is limitless, subject to no conditions" (*Karukku* 92). Gandhiji also stated that Harijans are "Children of God." But Harijans, including women, are raped and killed for just voicing identity.

It can be traced that Bama's suffering is the suffering of Dalits remains unchanged throughout India. She comprehends that Dalits have been forced to live a life of humiliation, and degradation beyond death. The construction of subjectivity in her autobiography reflects her desire to re-establish the wounded Dalit population. One may not make a concrete resolution for the caste discriminations. Bama sorrowfully says, "If you are born into a low caste, every moment of your life is a moment of struggle. People screw up their faces and look at us with disgust the moment they know our caste..." (*Karukku* 23). There is a deep and underlying connection between Bama and the Dalit population as the black writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker.

Bama converted her personal sufferings into words. Her personal experiences of poverty and discriminations are the saddest experiences that form the core of her autobiography *Karukku*. It is the upper caste and wealthy people of India who hold the caste and its principles. Stephen Bufferfield, in *Black Autobiography in America*, writes:

The "self" of black autobiography...is not an individual with a private career....The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group with ties and responsibilities to the other members. (5)

Bama has come out with a renewed soul after experiencing the cruelty and injustices caused by the so called caste pride. *Karukku* is not a simple sentimental autobiography designed to evoke a sense of empathy from the reader. Rather, she wants her autobiography to be a source for global forum to redress the traumas of caste oppressions and injustices in India:

....I feel certain contentment in leading an ordinary life among ordinary people....Those people who stuck with me in my prosperous days have torn themselves away and gone. A few who heard of my present distress have come to me on the pretext of wishing to help and heal, but have merely stirred the wound; they too have left....I comfort myself

with the thought that rather than live with a fraudulent smile, it is better to lead a life weeping real tears. (*Karukku* 104)

Thus, Bama's individuality is not recognized by Christian and Hindu institutions. That is why, the Dalit population started to embrace other religions. Bama rejected both Christianity and Hinduism which shackled her ambitions in particular, and the poor in general.

Gunasekaran's *The Scar* unfolded tales of poverty and oppressions from his childhood itself. He has confronted life experiences of a Paraya, one of the Dalit communities formerly known as untouchables – from Elayankudi village in Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu. The narration begins with the author's recollection of his days in the surrounding villages near Elayankudi. Gunasekaran had first felt psychological caste prejudice while studying six, seven, and eight standards. A school clerk often reinforced the name of caste in public, it is a mean of devaluing, "How many in this class are Parayars?" (*The Scar* 5). In the early period of Gunasekaran boyhood, he identified caste discriminations in the form of "reinforcement" – a way of developing knowledge but here way of labeling. In spite of this, he was respected.

In an interview, Gunasekaran told that carrying death news is an unpaid job and should be removed. But he carried the news in his early life. It is a trauma rather than a

service, "....We would announce, 'So and so in Thovoor has passed away and the funeral will be at the early hours the next day...Some houses would offer us rice, porridge or gruel...(The Scar 29). Gunasekaran also said that "In general, the governments should give healthy food through 'The Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation' to Dalits" (Personal Interview).

Whenever Dalits migrate, they used to hide their community; otherwise they will be discriminated in relation, business, and job. In New Delhi, recently an assault happened that a Dalit was attacked by upper caste landlord for hiding caste [impersonated]. Ananya Sengupta reported:

A Dalit student in Delhi? Hide your surname -
Brutal assault by upper-caste landlord on research scholar blows lid off capital's can of worms
Most Dalit students in the capital admit to facing harassment because of their caste. "I remember overhearing two teachers in my college discuss why a Dalit needs to study - they were laughing over the fact that if all Dalits start getting educated, who would clean their toilets and drag their rickshaws. This is what we have to go through everyday in our lives," said a student pursuing a degree in social work from Delhi University.
(The Telegraph, 6 May 2008)

It happens when a Dalit hides his caste is considered as a successful life management for survival. Some folk artists were relatives of Gunasekaran, but they behaved as if strangers to the village people or other caste people. It is a strategy to hide their caste in order to earn the goodwill of the programme contractors. Otherwise, they will not be entertained. At this juncture, the artists did not disclose their caste:

....Even if they are from Pudukottai and Thanjavur they are basically from places in and around Thovoor and settled in these far away towns for the sake of profession. They had gone out of their hometowns mainly to escape the oppression of the upper caste. If they had stayed on they would have had to do as they were bidden. It was generally slavish work without recompense. That is why these artists went away to distant places and practiced their profession with dignity. (*The Scar* 35)

In India, an individual is valued or respected based on his or her caste. It is constituted with myths, legends and superstitions. Gunasekaran felt anguished after the state of affairs of hiding caste [impersonated] within the Dalits. He did not hide his caste as "Paraya," rather, his father asked Gunasekaran not to say openly their caste. As long as

Gunasekaran was in Elayankudi, his family did not face any discrimination from the Muslim people.

Inter-caste marriage was supported to abolish caste hegemony. If a couple dare for new union, they will be supported by the Indian Law, "Marriage between couples across caste and religious lines may be sanctified under the Special Marriage Act 1954..."(qtd. in Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada). However, Dalits face "negligence" in law and society. Gunasekaran gave an anecdote of inter-caste love that ended in the death of a Pallar woman - Michael Amma. A Udayar boy loved Michael Amma. She was afraid that her family and people will be killed if she eloped with a Udayar boy - an upper caste. Out of anger, the Udayar boy hacked Michael Amma with a sickle. Her head rolled on the ground, as Gunasekaran remembers, "She is said to have asked him, 'Will your people allow me to live if I get married to you?....Her head rolled to the ground'" (*The Scar* 37-38). But the Udayar boy is now a peon the Kilanchunnai Government Hospital.

Many of the Indian news agencies report these kinds of murders. As one of the incidents reported by Dipak Kumar Dash is that the killing was to "salvage his family's honour." A Dalit is seen as a scapegoat. Dipak Kumar Dash narrates the story of "Inter-caste marriage ends in honour killing:"

MUZAFFARNAGAR: A 23-year-old youth, Ajit Saini, was brutally killed by the brother of the Jat girl he

loved and claimed to have married and his body has been found probably a week after the murder.

Saini's throat had been slit and legs chopped off. His name tattooed on his left hand had been burnt off with acid. The alleged killer, Anuj Tomar, has been arrested and is said to have confessed to the crime. (*The Times of India*)

Gunasekaran was not aware of any atrocities in Elayankudi. One day, he went to his grandmother home [his father birthplace], she sent him to buy cooking oil in the Thevoor' shop. He walked on the farmland's embankment. A man came in the opposite direction gave a slap "I screamed out for my mother." Similarly, Gunasekaran asked a boy who was cutting the leaf for his goats. The boy immediately slapped on his cheek, because the boy belonged to an upper caste:

My ammayi gave me a bottle one day and asked me to buy oil from the shop at south Keeranoor....I was humming a song to make my solitary travel easy. When the person who came in the opposite direction came near me I took one leg off the bund and kept it on the field and gave him space to walk past me. Like lightning, it happened. A slap on the cheek caught me unawares and I screamed out for my mother. My ears rang and my cheek got swollen. (*The Scar* 42-43)

Gunasekaran's experiences of atrocities were the similar experiences of Dalits in India. It is found that Dalit writers are voicing for self-respect, identity, and tradition. Dalits were denied to learn literature and science for centuries. But in America, as Copper, Hawthorne, James and others have noted:

This society [USA] had very little cultural tradition. Thus, writers had to look to themselves for their literary resources and to their own lives as the primary sources of value and meanings. Thus, the American question is a central part of the American literary tradition. (qtd. in Holte 25)

When Gunasekaran was sleeping in the cart in his father's native place, an upper caste man woke him up. He justified his superiority by accusing that while an upper caste man was standing how can a Paraya sit on the cart? But upper caste man wanted Gunasekaran as "Keeranur K.A. Gunesakaran" in the AIR instead of Elayankudi:

He looked at me and said, 'While I am standing who do you think you are to sit in such a leisurely manner on the cot? Get up!' I got up slowly. The moment he recognised me, he said, 'Oh! You are the fellow who sings on the radio, is it?' I nodded my head in assent. (*The Scar* 53)

In spite of education and improvement in behaviours in the parts of Dalits, they were not respected and accepted. When Muniyandi, the uncle of Gunasekaran, saveda Konar from fits stroke, he was assaulted for his touching an upper caste man:

The water brought back the man to his senses and as he opened his eyes Machan said, 'Ayya, it's me Muniyandi, Karupan's grandson. You fell down with fits and I brought you here....The moment he finished recounting what happened, the Konar who had regained not only his consciousness but also his arrogance said, 'Who asked you touch me? How can you, a Parayan, touch me?' (*The Scar* 60)

As Anderson rightly says, "Autobiography is a form of witnessing which matters to others" (5). Dalits have been discriminated due to their birth. They were attacked with hands and were treated as "traditional untouchables." There is a relentless logic that flows from their being as aboriginal people of India and have been subjected to exploitations in every day reality. The caste and religions tension and hostilities towards Dalits are severe and stronger.

Even Ambedkar recalled, with tears, an assault of upper caste people when he impersonated as a Parsi, in his autobiographical notes, *Waiting for a Visa*:

I had gone to Baroda with high hope[s]. I had given up many offers. It was wartime. Many places in the Indian Educational service were vacant. I knew very influential people in London. But I did not seek any of them. I felt that my duty was to offer my services first to the Maharaja of Baroda, who had financed my education. And here I was driven to leave Baroda and return to Bombay, after a stay of only eleven days.

This scene of a dozen Parsis armed with sticks lined [up] before me in a menacing mood, and myself standing before them with a terrified look imploring for mercy, is a scene which so long a period as eighteen years has not succeeded in fading [causing to fade] away. I can even now vividly recall it--and [I] never recall it without tears in my eyes. It was then for the first time that I learnt that a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Parsi. (8)

The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 makes punishable a dozen acts of atrocities against a member of the SC/ST. Despite the legal safeguards provided for the protection of the SC/ST from caste based atrocities and discrimination, the atrocities on Dalits are not coming to an end and Dalits are still meted

out with various forms of atrocities in different parts of the country. *The Constitution of India* aimed at constructing an egalitarian social order free from all caste based prejudices but Ambedkar says:

On 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in the social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man, one vote and one vote, one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man, one value. (qtd. in Chandrapal 1)

While speaking on the eve of the moving of the Draft Constitution in 1949, Ambedkar showed his non-challengeable fear regarding the existing inequalities in the Indian society.

Thus, this chapter collected the archives of atrocities and psychological impacts that ignited the feelings of Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and K.A. Gunasekaran through their autobiographies. This chapter also explored the unspeakable hidden apartheid towards Dalits in the hearts and souls of the upper caste men and women.

Chapter V

Self and Social Consciousness

The significance of individual relationship with politics and literary expression could be traced from the view of social reality and cultural ideologies. It is also necessary to examine the social awakening of the "self" with outer "selves." Today, *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life*, *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*, *The Prisons We Broke*, *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography*, *Karukku*, and *The Scar* are widely read Dalit autobiographies. They inspire each individual of Dalits with brotherhood. They also express Dalits' sorrow and oppression.

As Stephen Bufferfield writes of African-American autobiographies, "The self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self" (qtd. in Mostern 51). It is observed that negro's autobiographies serve as lens to understand the sufferings of slavehood. Similarly, Dalits have been mute for centuries, and now began to voice for the entire community.

Self-consciousness affects people in varying degrees, as some people are constantly self-monitoring or self-involved, while others are completely oblivious about themselves. Psychologists frequently distinguish between two kinds of self-consciousness, private and public. Private

self-consciousness is a tendency to introspect and examine one's inner self and feelings. Public self-consciousness is an awareness of the self as it is viewed by others. This kind of self-consciousness can result in self-monitoring and social anxiety. Both private and public self-consciousness are viewed as personality traits.

Omprakash documented his social interests *Joothan*. The autobiography focused on the experiences of men and women of Dalit community. Omprakash's depiction of childhood has the significant memory of caste atrocities, poverty, injustices, and humiliations. He gives an account of the people who went school for the first time after several centuries. Satpal, Hiram Singh, and Omprakash were the first Dalit students who began to enter school. They began to improve, but undervalued by the upper caste men and women.

Omprakash's sense of "self" and "community" were juxtaposed in his *Joothan* as heart and soul. He observed his and the upper caste people in order to educate and improve life style of Dalits. As an individual, he was not allowed to utilize the governments' welfare schemes by upper caste teachers and classmates. After joining school, the Tyagi and other upper caste students ridiculed Omprakash by insulting him with the pejorative statement, "Abe, churha:"

After a few years, Omprakash improved in his study. But a Tyagi's son attacked him and scattered his book in the

muddy ground. Even the teachers never liked his progress. He asked the Master Sahib "Why the author failed to mention the least food *mar* - rice gruel?" *Mar* is the main food of poor Dalits:

....He ordered a boy to get a long teak stick.

"Chuhre ke, you dare compare yourself with Dronacharya. Here, take this, I will write an epic on your body."....Literature can only imagine hell. For us the rainy season was a living hell. The epic poets of Hindi have not even touched upon the terrible sufferings of the villages. What a monstrous truth that is. (JUL 27)

Omprakash's social consciousness of poverty showed that he was really attached to the "truth" of his contemporary society. For the question, the Master wrote a new epic of brutal beating on his back. Indian literature favoured the upper caste people and also expressed their physical emotion, longing for love and sex, whereas, it did not include Dalits' social condition.

Customs are attached to people and their culture. But the upper caste people imposed certain intolerable customs on Dalits. As per the *Varna* system, Dalits duties are to dispose dead animal (carcass), clean toilets, drainage, attend cattle, carrying death-news, and labouring in the farms. Omprakash brought out another event that the newly wedded bride and

bridegroom should go to the upper caste people's street and salute in order to get some gifts or money. His father did not like the custom, and he gave instruction to break the custom:

Pitaji stared at me as though he were seeing me for the first time. Seeing him quiet, the restlessness inside me began to pour out. "The bridegroom goes from door to door at his own wedding. It is awfulPitaji was listening to me quietly. "Munshiji, sending you to school has been a success. I too have understood your point. We will now break this custom." (*JUL* 39)

Omprakash's father had a different mind-set – that he wanted his son to get an education and improve the caste. Similarly, the entire community identified themselves with Omprakash:

The exam for class ten was a board exam [for his diploma]. The Hindi and English exams were over. I was the first student of my caste, not just from my *basti* but from all the surrounding villages of the area, to appear for the high school exams. They were all watching me. I too had begun to realize the responsibility that I carried. (*JUL* 65)

Belonging to weaker section of India, Omprakash's life began with poverty, caste assault, atrocities, and humiliation.

There is no security for a Dalit student in the government and non-government schools. He says that an upper caste man was not aware of any assault and humiliation and began to achieve many things in his/her life. For instance, Omprakash was preparing for the board examination, Fauz Singh Tyagi drew him to his sugarcane field for free labour. There was no one to rescue Omprakash in his colony.

His father gave him a copy of *Bhagavad Gita*. After reading the book, he found that Dalits were not given importance, but only the Hindu men and women. Of course, the *Gita* inspired Omprakash to ask questions, and made him a rationalist. It is unusual that upper caste people never ask questions to God that why "Dalits were discriminated?" However, Omprakash questioned, and for that he was punished by the upper caste teacher:

....My discomfort with my reading was arousing a new consciousness in me. I began to get bored by the *Gita*. I wanted answers to the questions bobbing inside my head. Whenever I dared to ask my schoolteachers to answer my doubts, I got punished. They beat me up, gave me lower marks in the examinations. The taunts of my teachers and fellow students pierced me deeply. "Look at this Chuhre ka, pretending to be a Brahmin." (JUL 71)

Omprakash realised that he was given opportunity not only for study and also to change the society. Gradually, the study of Omprakash developed and began to concentrate on his dreams of emancipation. As a goodwill gesture, Chamanlal Tyagi congratulated Omprakash and honoured him for passing the Board Examination.

Omprakash began to visit libraries in Dehra Dun. Hemlal introduced Ambedkar's books to Omprakash. So far, he did know anything about Ambedkar. It is the fact that Indian Mass Media consider all the politician except Ambedkar. Omprakash did not even hear a word about Ambedkar from the mouth of an upper caste man:

....As I was flipping its pages, Hemlal said, "You must read this book." The name of the book was *Dr.Ambedkar: A Biography*. Its author was Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu. Ambedkar was an unknown entity to me then....I knew about Gandhi, Nehru....On Republic Day we heard countless narratives of devotion to the country, but they never included the name of the author of the Constitution. All the media of communication had been unable to inform people like me about this name. (JUL 82-83)

Even during the Republic Day of India [on 26 January], no one talked about the Chairman of *The Constitution of India*, Babasaheb Ambedkar. The upper caste people never think or

speaking about a Dalit. This philosophy lives in the society and it is reflected in the Dalit autobiographies. The memories of Omprakash attracted the reader on the issue of "neglecting Ambedkar in the Mass Media:"

The hatred of thousands of years was once again visible in its original form. I saw this movement of Dalit assertion from close up. Each follicle of my body felt the heat of the movement. The cruel social arbiters of Indian society were denying individual merit. In their eyes Ambedkar was simply a Mahar...(JUL 123)

Omprakash consoled himself that even when the foreign educated Ambedkar was not respected by the upper caste people, how would a poor Dalit be respected in India. The replica of Omprakash's community is those who stand outside the upper caste houses.

Most of the upper caste people have their community name as prefix or suffix in their name i.e., V. O. Chidambaram Pillai [*Pillai* is a popular title used by land owning caste in Tamil], Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy [*Reddy* people are a high-caste community of nobility, warriors, and cultivators], Vallabhbhai Jhaverbhai Patel [*Patel* originally meaning "headman" or "village chief"], and Pasumpon Muthuramalingam Thevar [*Thevar* who belongs to the warrior community].

Valmiki (the author of *The Ramayana Epic*) is an unnamed highway robber who used to rob people before killing them. The robber meditated for many years, so much so that ant-hills grew around his body. Finally, a divine voice declared his penance successful, bestowing him with the name "Valmiki": "one born out of ant-hills," in Sanskrit means [Ant-hill]. Thus, Omprakash Valmiki got the surname. Even though "Valmiki" referred to the poet, Omprakash Valmiki was not respected rather humiliated for the name:

....When caste is the basis of respect and merit, important for social superiority, this battle cannot be won in a day. We need an ongoing struggle and a consciousness of struggle, a consciousness that brings revolutionary change both in the outside world and in our hearts, a consciousness that leads the process of social change...Because in their eyes, I am only an SC, the one who stands outside the door. (*JUL* 152-54)

Thus, Omprakash's aspiration for social emancipations was mentally crushed and his freedom was restricted based on his caste as Dalit.

Vasant Moon narrated that the historical and political hostility between Mahars and Hindus was inevitable. Hindus attacked Mahars. Dalits got the self and social consciousness to boycott the traditionally clamped occupations. A

developing Dalit man, Dasharath Patil, gave support to the poor people. In spite, his life was threatened by the upper caste people:

Around 1930 Dasharath Patil gave a call for reform, and Mahars for miles around stopped carrying way dead animals. In every village boycotts were imposed on these rebels by caste Hindus. Mahars who went to the market could not make purchases. Mills in the villages were closed to them; beating began... (*GVI* 12)

Vasant recalled the attitude of his master Mr. Khedkar. The master understood Vasant's poverty and appealed to other rich people to donate shirt and pants to Vasant. He brought out his memory of deliberate inability in wearing a fair dress. The historical partition of British India on the basis of religious demographics led the creation of the sovereign states Dominion of Pakistan (on 15 August 1947, later the Islamic Republic of Pakistan). Hindu attacked Muslims to death. A social crisis that motivated Vasant to record as a historical, national, and religious tensions. Police and military never considered Dalits, later who sought the protection of Adivasis and did not get the humanitarian aids:

In 1950 the holocaust following Partition was fresh before the eyes of the people of Santragacchi. They showed marks made by knives in their doors and

walls. People said, "They would come in the night and mark the doors of Hindus. The assault of the Muslims was just beyond that tree. When the police and military came, they would run away. Then we sent for the Adivasis. They gave us protection with their bows and arrows." (*GUI* 57)

In 1938, Vasant Moon began to participate in a Dalit movement called Samata Sainik Dal (SSD) established in Nagpur. It taught Dalits discipline, military maneuver, and unity. Wherever Ambedkar organised meetings, the SSD volunteers maintained order and discipline. With the influence of Babasaheb, Vasant began to work for his people:

Everyone in the community, from schoolchildren to young men, came to the Dal. There was an effort to bring everyone. There was also strict discipline...youth coming to the Dal meetings in the evening began to grow. The Scheduled Caste Federation's conference was set to be held on 17 July 1942....Seeing the military maneuvers of Russian soldiers after 1950 in films, I always used to remember the Samata Sainik Dal. I could understand how meaningful was Babasaheb's intention in choosing red shirts and khaki pants. (*GUI* 65-68)

In spite of political progress, Dalits's life is not secured by the constitution of India. Dev Master cursed

Vasant Moon, "you may not pass in English." Later, Vasant passed matric and got M.A. Degree in Marathi, and he also edited the speeches of Ambedkar in English. Vasant understood that the upper caste teacher's curse and religious foretelling became false. Dalit people normally do not believe in God. Therefore, religious faith and ritual became barriers to this exploited Dalits, but change is inevitable:

....Who would have said, especially in the face of Dev Master's curse, that the work of editing and publishing Babasaheb Ambedkar's English writings would have been given to me? In the moving, shifting world, change is inevitable, and astrologers' predictions are proved fraudulent!

(GUI 86)

In 1942, the Indian National Congress party carried out "The Quit India Movement" against the British Government. Though, it was a Hindu political party, few Hindus joined British Army including Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh under the leadership of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar who was also considered one of the conspirators in Gandhi's assassination. But Ambedkar was still abused for supporting British. Whereas, Muslim League leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah got separate state Pakistan. He was never abused by Hindus. It was the rational thinking of Vasant as a symbol of "self" enlighten:

....Meanwhile the Hindu Mahasabha was also giving support to the British, ripping holes in Mahatma Gandhi's position. Savarkar and Ambedkar were telling Hindus to enter the British army. he Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), too, following Savarkar's policy, was helping the British in recruitment and in the war. Jinnah and the Muslim League were demanding an independent country. Still, no one said that these parties or leaders were traitors! (*GUI* 102)

On 30 January 1948, Gandhi was assassinated by a Maharastrian Brahmin. He was not given any abuse for killing "the Father of India." Vasant traced the historical documented in his autobiography to inform the readers that he was also the observer of the society as a whole. His idea and political attitudes towards Gandhi was good. He said, "...he was a great man" (*GUI* 106). However, Gandhi's stand on the Poona Pact [Poona Pact refers to an agreement between the lower caste Untouchables of India led by Ambedkar and the upper caste Hindus of India led by Gandhi that took place on 24 September 1932 at Yerawada Jail in Pune] disappointed Dalits. But Ambedkar worked for his people who were exploited for several centuries. American president Barack Obama understood the values of Gandhi and Ambedkar. He gave equal respect to these personalities. Yet, Indian is not read see

them as national heroes. Barack Obama stated at the Central Hall in the Indian parliament:

We believe that the future is what we make it. We believe that no matter who you are or where you come from, every person can fulfill their God-given potential, just as a Dalit like Dr. Ambedkar could lift himself up and pen the words of the constitution that protects the rights of all Indians. (*Indian Express*, 8 Nov. 2010)

Vasant began to boycott Hindu festivals. Ambedkar's conversion into Buddhism awakened the consciousness of Dalits' "selves." The deprivation and exploitation of God and Goddesses are not serious mistakes in the eyes of upper caste people:

By 1942 we had given up our celebration of nearly all the Hindu festivals. There were two trends of thinking even about Diwali...."Today is Lakshmipuja [Worship of wealth]." "Up to today we don't have any money, so where has this Lakshmi gone?"
(*GVI* 131-132)

Vasant got a government job as a Deputy County Commissioner. Thereafter, he wished his mother to take rest as a gesture of honour. A few years later, on 19 January 1992 his mother Purnabai passed away. She taught Vasant as the A for "Aspiration," the B for "Babasaheb," and the C for

"Confidence." But Purnabai was not fully educated. She taught the social thinker Ambedkar to Vasant.

The poverty began to disappear, but his thoughts on caste discrimination still glowing in his writings. The landscape changed, but his childhood was not fully enjoyed by him. So he wanted to go back to the earthen house:

When I began work in 1953 as Deputy County
Commissioner at Sausar in Madhya Pradesh...Oh,
friends....The name of Maharpura has been changed
Anandnagar....Even so I remember it from time to
time. I should again become small and go live in
some small earthen house in that vasti...

(GUI 169-176)

Thus, Vasant Moon's personal and social interests are deeply ignited by social thinkers Karl Marx, Ambedkar, and western literature. They inspired him to document the social issues in his autobiography.

In *Prisons We Broke*, Baby Kamble recorded historical events in her autobiography. Her memory attracts the researcher on the issues of poverty, settlement, and cultural attitude of the Mahar people. Her father Pandhrinath undertook a canal construction project from the British Government in 1918. Through the construction work, poor people got job and earned some money to feed their starving children:

.....In 1918, a canal was to be dug in Phaltan. But before the work could start, the thick wild cactus bush had to be cleared. My father bagged this contract and completed the work quite satisfactorily....People somehow managed to survive on that meager amount so long as there was work. But once the work on the canal got over, they had to face tough times. (PWB 3)

Kamble narrates her life from her childhood that witnessed her people's suffering and their survival. Dalits work in the upper caste people's homes and farms. The food-grains and seeds were gathered by them in hot sun light. But they were given less wage, sometimes nothing. But the food-grains were touched and cleaned by Dalits:

When the Mahar women labour in the fields, the corn gets wet with their sweat. The same corn goes to make your pure, rich dishes. And you feast on them with such evident relish! Your palaces are built with the soil soaked with the sweat and blood of Mahars...does it rot your skin? You drink their blood and sleep comfortably on the bed of their misery. Doesn't it pollute you then? Just as the farmer pierces his bullock's nose and inserts a string through the nostrils to control it, you have

pierced the Mahar nose with the string of
ignorance...(PWB 56)

Kamble's political and sociological attitudes towards Babasaheb Ambedkar are great. Her consciousness was ignited by Dalit Panther Movement and writings of Ambedkar. Besides, Dalits began to identify their origin and freedom. They themselves incorporated the personality of Ambedkar. They proudly said:

....'Hey, have you heard? It seems there is a meeting of the Mahars in the chawdi,' one would say. Another would respond immediately, 'Yes, yes. You people from Veergaon, this is exactly what our relative from Saswad was saying too. You know, they say this boy Ambedkar belongs to our Mahar community; but he has been educated at a place far beyond the seven seas...(PWB 63)

On the one hand, Dalits worship Ambedkar. Their consciousnesses were reformed by his thoughts and creative thinking. On the other hand, upper caste people assault verbally "...that Ambedkar has educated himself. That's why these dirty Mahars are showing off!" (PWB 109). Baby Kamble remembers:

They would hurl stones at us and throw dust into our eyes....Then the teacher would hurl insults at us, to hit us with a long ruler, and make us bend

down and hold our toes till school was over....They would hurl insults at us, 'That Ambedkar has educated himself, that's why these dirty Mahars are showing off! That filthy Mahar, Ambedkar, eats dead animals but look at the airs he gives himself!'

(PWB 109)

Dalits were neglected by orthodox upper caste men and women. The unsecured Dalits are victims of instant atrocities on basis of caste. Mohammed Iqbal reported that "Dalit activist leaves hospital alleging negligence by doctors" (*The Hindu*, 9 March 2011). Baby Kamble deeply committed to her society, "....What was the purpose of Baba's life? For whom was Baba born? I realised that the purpose of his life was to empower the oppressed and to restore to them their human rights" (129). Ambedkar dedicated his life to the development of his people. Similarly, Baby Kamble followed Ambedkar in order to develop the standard of Dalits' lives. Her sense and selfhood was represented in her life and writings. Baby Kamble was one among the millions of Dalits whose lives were never respected in terms of socio-economic and religious perspectives. Yet, her humanitarian services provoke Dalits to the betterment of life. Thus, Baby Kamble brought out her community's tragic treatments in the Indian society.

Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* is entirely a document of educational and political development of Dalits. He got food

and basic needs from a Brahmin teacher Andamma. In spite of poor background, he did not reveal his poverty. In school, free study materials were given, but Siddalingaiah did not get them. The teacher Andamma saw the submissiveness and pleading face of Siddalingaiah and gave him more support in his studies:

I joined a government primary school near the graveyard. I had completed the first and second standards at Magadi and Manchanabele, so I joined the third standard. A teacher called Andamma worked in this school....My father's tattered clothes, his submissiveness, and his unshaven, pleading face proclaimed his poverty. Madam immediately called for the books and pencils meant for poor students and gave them to me. Her affection increased after she came to know that I was the son of an utterly poor man. (OKA 31-32)

Siddalingaiah settled at a slum called Srirampura in Bangalore and began to concentrate on his study. He also developed the art of speaking as the Negro slave; Frederic Douglass was influenced by the book *The Columbian Orator* (64). Thereafter, Douglass focused on slaves' emancipation. *The Columbian Orator*, then, becomes a symbol not only of human rights, but also of the power of eloquence and

articulation. To some extent, Douglass sees his own life's work as an attempt to replicate *The Columbian Orator*.

Similarly, Siddalingaiah read Ambedkar's books and gave speeches. Thereby, he earned sufficient money and bought clothes and books. Sometimes, he sold the prize cups to get books. Siddalingaiah's self-survival and progress show that he was a representative of Dalit people whose life is surrounded with poverty and struggle. In his personal interview, Siddalingaiah said, "I sold great book for my food." Besides, he worked wherever money comes in a decent way:

Once, when I was returning after emptying the garbage into the pit, someone recognised me and came forward to talk to me. Before he could open his mouth to say "Aren't you Siddalingaiah?" I contorted my already grimy face and limped my way to the owner's house. After working in the owner's house for a week, I was given a tip and sent back to the factory. The shorts supervisor slowly taught me the job. I became good at winding. Workers were paid once a week. With the money I earned I bought a book by Ambedkar called *Asprishyaru* (Untouchables), translated into Kannada by Kumara Venkanna. I wonder how much of the book I understood then. But there was no limit to my joy.

I worked for three or four months here and bought good books with the money I earned...(OKA 70)

He got the books for study by working in the house, factories, and by making speeches. Siddalingaiah said, "As president of Kannada Book Authority, I know the value of books" (Personal Interview). Similarly, all Dalit author worked in factories, farmlands and attempted for better life style:

An inter-collegiate debate took place at Bangalore's APS College. The topic was "God does not exist". I was to speak for the topic...In my speech, I said, "I have put out the lamp that was god incarnate. If your god does exist, let him stop me"....Students leaders came running and appealed to them not to assault me as that would bring a bad name to the college....I won the first prize in that debate. (OKA 80-81)

Siddalingaiah's attitude towards religion is that he was rationalist. Ambedkar and other social thinkers' ideologies influenced his consciousness to trace the existence of God. In a speech, he openly said "God does not exist." Upper caste people planned to assault Siddalingaiah. Fortunately, he got the first prize. He tried to awaken the consciousness of humanity that there is neither God nor caste system:

...the Swamiji had visited Dalit colonies. He had been speaking of reform. In the given set-up, what he had done was quite big. Yet I, being a fiery revolutionary, publicly asked the Pejavara swamiji, "if you are really concerned about the Dalits, make an untouchable the head of your religious order." The swamiji did not give a clear answer, but explained the concern he had for reform. The organisation took care of me very well till I left Udupi. (OKA 106)

Siddalingaiah asked Pejavara Swamiji to give equal job or treatment of a Dalit in his ashram. But the Swamiji kept silent. Siddalingaiah enlighten himself by reading books of great scholars, teachers and political leaders who worked for the welfare of Dalits. Thus, the *Ooru Keri* is the record of consciousness of "self" and "society." It became a source of motive for entire Dalits.

In *Karukku*, Bama constantly interrogated the institutions and herself. She appeals to the reader for justice through her writings. She got inspiration from his brother Raj Gautaman [Annan]. Bama contributed significant literary assets. As far as language is concerned, she used Dalit's spoken idiom. *Karukku* broke all conventions of life writings and created new domain for Dalit feminism that celebrates Dalit lives.

Bama became good in learning, and even though Bama was a Paraichi, many people became her friends in school. Besides, Bama's childhood memories attract the reader towards the description of her village and settlement. She also questioned why all the government buildings were constructed in the upper caste settlement. Vincent B Netto, "The Subaltern Can Speak?: Bama's *Sangati* as Chronicles of a Caste," proclaimed that:

Bama, one of the first Dalit women writers to be widely recognised and translated...committed to imparting values of self-esteem and social consciousness among the Dalits, she has tried to articulate the aspirations and the anxieties, the fear and the hope, the past and the present of her society. (67)

Bama's "self" was incurred to help the poor children. She saw that children of Dalits were ill-treated or misused by upper caste teachers in schools and Christian convents. Therefore, Bama decided to convert to Christianity as a "teacher-nun," so that she can enter as a teacher in convents:

....There was a desire in my heart to help other children to better themselves, as I, born into the same community....I really wanted to teach such children....In that convent, they really do treat

the people who suffer from poverty in one way, and those who have money in their pockets in a totally different way. (*Karukku* 66)

Bama was disappointed in her service in the Christian institution. She decided to quit her job. But there was no other source of income to run her life. With this state of deprivation, Bama came out to world of self-reliance:

Now, many thoughts come crowding to me. I am like a bird whose wings were broken. After its wings have been broken, it is protected only if it stays within its cage. But if it comes out, it can only flap its wings uselessly, unable to fly. And that is the state in which I am now. (*Karukku* 104)

Bama felt herself as a bird whose wings were cut off. She confesses that without earnings, she may not do anything. Therefore, her heart and soul filled with agony and humiliation. She also portrayed feministic expression which stands in clear testimony that she is a writer with a difference. Thus, Bama does not separate gender and caste identities, but she twisted them for the liberation of Dalits from all forms of oppressions.

In *The Scar*, Gunasekaran remembers his family and poverty which devastated his childhood. He also mentions how cultural and traditional formalities are being missed by lack of money. His sisters Kalavathi, Malathi, and Jothi did not

have ear-piercing ceremony due to poverty. Gunasekaran gave importance to women's basic desires. Whenever a puberty celebration goes on, he could not feel happy, since there was not such a celebration for his sister in the earlier days:

Due to poverty, our sisters, Kalavathi, Malathi, and Jothi did not have the ear-piercing ceremony....Even today, when I look at the invitation for a puberty ceremony, I immediately feel the pang of pain that we couldn't afford such celebrations for my sisters. (*The Scar* 10)

Gunasekaran failed in SSLC and he worked in N.H. Jalal Mat-Shop to support his family. Usually, a Dalit boy or girl was not free to learn or enjoy his or her childhood or adulthood. Gunasekaran's family was victim of poverty, and discrimination. He wanted to work to meet out the family expenses. A Muslim friend, N.H.Jalal who had a mat shop in Salaiyur had worked hard to have a shop in Sothukudi. Gunasekaran found employment in his shop. Gunasekaran's village people both Dalits and Muslims used to enjoy his voice and narration of movies. They gave him food and amount as compliment.

Later, Gunasekaran wrote poetry, folk songs, and plays and were staged. He also acted in the Tamil movie *Azhagi* in 2002. His consciousness about the inter-caste marriage was different. He said that the couple will be killed by the

upper caste relatives. It is only in film and politics love and inter caste marriages were highlighted:

....If a Dalit and a girl of a different caste were to fall in love, they would not be able to live peacefully unless they get out of their village and went away to a town. Even then, in some places, they are not about to save their live. The village high caste people, wanting to safeguard caste, would round up the couple who lived in the town and finish them off quietly.

Our cinemas do not talk about anything other than love....Actors and actresses become MLAs, MPs, and chief ministers in our country. But the love they depict in the movies simply vanish into thin-air in reality...(The Scar 39)

Gunasekaran's teacher Mr.Meera gave him a letter to join in the AIR, Trichy. The recommendation letter gave him an overwhelming opportunity to sing in the AIR. So far, he was in Dalit colonies and in a poverty ridden environment. After seeing the recording rooms, Gunasekaran was surprised to see a new world of advancement which was not accessible for a poore Dalits:

Meera took the N.S.S students to do relief work in Nagapattanam after the town was ravaged by a storm. On the way back, he had given an interview at the

Trichy Radio Station....He took me immediately to the recording theatre. I looked at the recording theatre with wonder and awe. So far my world have revolved around huts, rented houses and college...

(*The Scar* 71)

Gunasekaran took "Saiva Siddhanta" as his elective in his M.A. programme. He was unwilling to study the Hindu related subjects. But, teacher Om Periyaswami thought him "Karagam" and "Kavadi." These are the folk arts which attracted Gunasekaran.

Om Periyaswami took Gunasekaran to New Delhi in 1987 for Republic Day celebrations as a member of the cultural team. The then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, gave dinner to all the artists, and a photo-shot was taken. Though the teacher belonged to an upper caste, he taught good lessons without discriminations.

Gunasekaran was not interested in religious faith. His father taught him *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. As a progressive thinker, Gunasekaran also learnt *Bible* and *Kuran* to build up his moral qualities:

....Now and then father would tell us the stories from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Father was a progressive thinker. Our parents never showed any special interest in God, temples and rituals. We

too never came under the influence of faith because of them. (*The Scar* 83)

Gunasekaran got the opportunity to felicitate at the Chevaliar Award to Tamil actor Sivaji Ganesan in America. He saw a procession for demonstration "demanding same-sex marriages." He thought that Indian Dalits are still unaware of their basic rights and live in darkness, whereas America has entered into inter-race marriage and same-sex marriage:

The Tamizh Sangam had invited me to U.S.A to felicitate Sivaji Ganesan when he had received the Chevaliar Award. I went to Canada also. Over there I saw around 40000 people taking part in a procession demanding the legislation of same sex marriages... (*The Scar* 88)

Gunasekaran was very particular about the culture and people of various societies. As an intellectual, he staged street plays to educate the people about the caste indifferences and its impacts. In his personal interview, he stated, "All my genres bring out various factors that would liberate the Dalits from caste system" (3). Similarly, Ambedkar recalled certain burning consciousness of his fellow Dalits in his autobiographical narration *Waiting for a Visa*, "All this I knew. But this incident gave me a shock as I had never received before, and it made me think about untouchability" (5).

Gunasekaran says that non-Dalits, of course, are aware of the existence of untouchability. But they are not the direct victims of discrimination. In his interview, he also said that:

The problem is how best to give an idea of the way the untouchables are treated by the caste Hindus. A general description or a record of cases and of the treatment accorded to them are the two methods by which this purpose could be achieved. I have felt that the latter would be more effective than the former. In choosing these illustrations I have drawn partly upon my experience and partly upon the experience of others. I begin with events that have happened to me in my own life.

(Personal Interview, 2 Sept. 2011)

This is what Eleanor Zelliot, in her latest article "Connected People: Pilgrimage in the Structure of the Ambedkar Movement," said that "In 1929, Dr. Ambedkar led a group of Mahars out to the pillar, attempting to instill in his followers qualities of bravery and courage..."(1-5).

The most determined ideologies of Ambedkar are found in all the autobiographies of Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and Gunasekaran. It is undeniable that the ideologies of Marxism and Ambedkar's movements are well documented by the Dalit people. Thus, this

chapter found the rational energies were ignited by various caste oppressions. A fine blending of form and content are reflecting the social reality that would have an impact on the readers that would also provide him/her insights to comprehend the Dalits in India.

Chapter VI

Identity and Activism

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson trace that there are "sixty genres" of life narratives, and "twenty four narrative strategies" (235-86). Among them, the slave narratives of African American unfolded the human to human deprivations. With the influence of slave narrative, Dalit autobiographies also have parallel expressions of caste hidden apartheid.

Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and K.A. Gunasekaran were civil-heroes of Indian Dalits. Their autobiographies were self-life-narration of oppressed community. The memories and content of expressions are the product of society. Each Dalit authors considered his or her writings as "agents" to bring transition. They use the autobiographies for assertion and activism as the Abolitionist Movement in America. Eleanor Zelliot, in her perceptive analysis of Dr. Ambedkar's central relevance to Dalit assertion, "The Meaning of Ambedkar," explains:

Dr. Ambedkar's position among Dalits can be equated with that of a guru, one who leads his disciples to develop their own identity and wisdom.

Dr. Ambedkar's stance against all that he saw as evil, as harmful to the lowly and hence to the

country, is a source of mobilisation. Further, Dr. Ambedkar stands tall as a symbol of achievement.... Ambedkar's Dalit is a man or woman filled with pride and self-respect. Social movements thrive on pride. The multi-faceted Dr. Ambedkar stands for both qualities: pride and self-respect.

(qtd. in Prakash Louis 135-137)

In 1999, New York based Human Rights Watch published a report on the Dalits. It found that the situation of Dalits was severely deplorable and called Dalits' condition as "hidden apartheid." Vijay Prasad also says "Despite India's progressive laws, Dalits do not enjoy the protections to which they are entitled" (2).

Omprakash's father challenged the Headmaster and asserted that the Chuhre (Dalit) would "study in the school itself." As a father, he has defended his son's freedom. Though *The Constitution of India* provides opportunities to improve, Dalits were not honestly entertained in the public and private institutions. Upper caste people believe in the Hindu's sacred-text, *The Vedas*, but not in *The Constitution of India*: Supreme Law of India and its principles in the modern India.

Omprakash's father identified his status as weaker community and wished to give education to his son. The provision for education was denied to Omprakash Valmiki. It

was illegal to prevent or threaten a Dalit from education. It is the right of every citizen of India says *The Constitution of India* in "Part III- Fundamental Rights - Articles. 15-16" (7). Up to the present time, most of the government officers never respect the "law:" Omprakash remembers the voice of a school Headmaster:

The headmaster had roared, "Take him away from here. The Chuhra wants him educated. Go, go - otherwise I will have your bones broken." Pitaji took my hand and started walking toward our home. As he walked away, he said, loud enough for the headmaster to hear, "You are a teacher. So I am leaving now. But remember this much, Master: This Chuhre ka will study right here, in this school. And not just him, there will be more coming after him." (JUL 7)

Omprakash got an opportunity to go school, but he was not allowed to sit with his fellow class-mates. After Intermediate, he began to participate in Ambedkar's social emancipation campaign. Of course, Gandhiji was a great leader until Omprakash began to read Ambedkars' theory of caste system. However, he did appreciate the greatness of Gandhi who was assassinated in 1948:

From textbooks to the media of communication, they were all beating the drum about Gandhi....After

reading Ambedkar, I realized that by naming the untouchables Harijans, Gandhi had not helped them to join the national mainstream...saved the Hindus from becoming a minority. Guarded their interests, in fact. Yet these upper castes were angry with him because he had turned Harijans' heads!....The Poona Pact was what had made Ambedkar lose heart.

(JUL 83-84)

Omprakash got a direction after reading about Dr.Ambedkar. The feeling of protest against caste system strengthened within him after employment. At first a new word "Dalit" was also added to his vocabulary, which was not replacement for the term "Harijan" but an expression of the anger of millions of untouchables. He remembered that, "I got a new direction....My anger started articulating.... Literature provided me this courage"(JUL 83-84).

Omprakash was involved in political campaigning. He found deprivations in voting. Mostly Dalits were not allowed to vote for themselves. He actively participated to highlight the rights of Dalits and the importance of democracy and the denial of franchise. His consciousness to make his people progress became his life motto:

We walked around Roorkee's neighborhoods and nearby villages, campaigning for our friend. The canvassing provided me with the opportunity to see

the lives of people at close range. I heard their stories of deprivation....How innocent were those people, totally uncomprehending of the meaning or value of independence. But, then, had independence truly reached them? The pimps of the ruler were exploiting them for their own ends. (*JUL* 86-87)

Technical education gave Omprakash food and dignity. He stayed in the Jabalpur Ordinance Factory and began to enjoy sports, reading literature, and participated in political movements. He felt satisfaction in his food and basic needs which were never seen before. He says, "....I also began to develop my own views about literature. I was more attracted to social realism than to aesthetics and formalist types of writings" (*JUL* 99).

Omprakash was disturbed by the outcome of social injustices. He wrote about Ganwai brothers who were blinded by some upper caste people near Poona. He was warned that as a government servant he should not write articles on such social issues. As a writer, he was covered with bondage and restriction. There was also a fact that no upper caste media brought out the physical blinding atrocity so far. He sent an essay on the problems of Dalits to *Navbharat Times*, Bombay. But his higher officers did not like his social commitment:

I had always dreamed of doing social work among the Dalits, and during my time in Chandrapur I was able

to put my plans into practice. In Maharashtra the groundwork done by Ambedkar and Jotirao Phooley inspired thousands upon thousands to join the struggle. This intellectual revolution provided a new dimension to my writing. (*JUL* 122)

In 1974, he started a theater group called Meghdoot Natya Sanstha, and he got interested both in writing and politics. As Omprakash began to work more on social works, the *Savarna* caste members began to leave Meghdoot Natya Sanstha. The upper caste people never liked Omprakash's activities:

....The *savarna* caste members of our organization, which was called Meghdoot Natya Sanstha, would inevitably be very busy with some important matters at such times. They disappeared from the scene during the Ambedkar birth anniversary celebrations. Only during Ganesh Chaturthi, Shivaji Jayanti, Janmashtami, and Ramnavami, all important festivals of the gods worshipped by the *savarnas*....This behaviour exposed the internecine divisions among us. I wanted to discuss these problems and contradictions, but they would avoid sitting down with me and talking openly about these issues. They said things behind my back, called Ambedkar names. My blood would begin to boil at such betrayals. (*JUL* 127)

As a writer and activist, Omprakash executed a number of street plays and cultural programmes in order to educate his people. His intellectual revolution became higher and higher. He became the editor of Ambedkar's speeches in English. When he became a popular artist, his upper caste colleagues began to discriminate him in working place and cultural activities. However, he was active in mobilizing Dalits' consciousness:

In January 1984 an incident that took place in Malkapur in the Amravati district that epitomized the narrow mindedness of these parts. Marathi textbook meant for class seven included a lesson on Ambedkar. All the students ripped out the lesson on the orders of a Brahmin teacher....*Lokmat* published the story and photographs of the torn pages....This incident became a symbol of Dalit oppression....The board of education took no disciplinary action against the teacher....The whole episode affected me deeply. Now I was spending most of my time in Dalit *bastis*. (*JUL* 129-130)

Omprakash recorded the social issues in magazines, newspapers, and books. He recorded an event in a school. Ambedkar's life lesson was prescribed in the seventh standard in Marathi Medium school. The lesson was torn off from the text by the order of a Brahmin teacher. Though the lesson was intended to awaken the Dalits' social consciousness, the

upper caste teacher never liked Dalits' emancipation. Omprakash also made clear that the Board of Education did not take any disciplinary action to punish the teacher. The government officers and the upper caste people never considered Dalits as human being and never whole heartily support the Dalits' welfare. These kinds of discriminations and treacheries based on caste totally affected the author.

As visionary A.B.J. Abdul Kalam, in "A Note by the Author," to *Wings of Fire* says:

When I first began the reminiscences that have gone into this book, I was uncertain which of my memories were worth narrating. My childhood is precious to me, but would it be of any revelance to anyone else?...it tells the story of an individual destiny, which cannot be seen in isolation from the social matrix in which it is embedded.(iii)

Omprakash was very particular on the education of his men and women. Yet, Dalits were still considered inferior either in education or in life style. Every individual is important in a society. But, Dalits were not given chances to think and work towards personal and national progress.

Vasant Moon established his intellectual identity in his writings. As a Dalit, he faced several abuses and discrimination during his life period. In 1920, Sasharath Patil Malguzar joined Ambedkar's movement for the welfare of

Dalits and they began boycotting carrying dead animals, and cleaning upper caste peoples' streets and toilets. But Sasharath Patil Malguzar's life was threatened, and his properties were set-fire [Arson] by all the upper caste people. Sporadic attack and destroying the Dalits' property are hellish affairs used by upper caste people.

If the exploited Dalits go to the police department for justice, they were not respected and sometimes even false FIRs were maintained. Many Dalit women were raped and killed by police men. It was a testimony in the recent decade of the twenty first century. The *BBC's* South Asia News reported the groundbreaking verdiction of the High Court on false FIR on Dalits in Tamil Nadu.

Vasant remembered the mass atrocities in Nagpur against Dalits. He narrowly escaped an assault. The Babalya, the village watchman, gave the message, "Murderers are hiding to kill you. Don't go to the village" (*GUI* 12). Dalits began to convert into other religions in order to get social and economic security. Their hopes remain unfulfilled longing. In religions also, Dalits were discriminated as converted "Fugitive Personalities."

Like the prominent American abolitionist, journalist, and social reformer, William Lloyd Garrison and his magazine *The Liberator* (1831), Babasaheb Ambedkar's newspaper *Janat* began to reach people and established social awakening. Dalit

students began to form SC federation across India. The untouchable students formed the All-India Scheduled Caste Student Federation (AISCSF) after the 1942 conference, and branches were started in Madras, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh (then the United Provinces) and in Mumbai (Bombay):

On the evening of a second day, Wamanrao held a study session in the Dal branch. "Babasaheb says, sheep and goats are sacrificed, not lions and tigers. Yesterday we had a parade. People saw our strength. Now no one will cross us." Up to then the instructions of the Dal...took up a broader program of confronting evil, resisting injustice and atrocities. (*GUI* 68)

The SSD and AISCSF conducted a parade in Nagpur city to show their strength of union and assertion. Ambedkar symbolised Dalits as "sheep" and "goats." These creatures were sacrificed whereas lions and tigers were not sacrificed to Gods. Therefore, he wanted his people as "lions" and "tigers" in strength. Like "the Underground Railroad." The SSD helped to create social awakening among Dalits. The newspaper *Janat* worked to voice against the social injustices in India.

In 1942, Quit India Movement was in its full swing to remove the British Government and demand immediate independence. Besides Ambedkar, RSS also supported the

British Government in order to access employments and social developments. The then British Governor-General of India, Lord Linlithgow, had unilaterally and without consultation brought "The British Indian Army" into the war. Some wanted to support the Battle of Britain, hoping for eventual independence through this support. The agitators broke the window glasses of a school in which Vasant was studying. The police came and controlled the mob. But Ambedkar and Dalits were branded as traitor:

When I reached the school, around eight to ten boys were present in every class. "Those who don't want to come should not leave their houses," proclaimed Khedhar Mater, and began to teach....Windows broke and glass fell inside. We hid under benches. The police came. A scramble began, and we remained sitting inside the school for the whole day.

(GUI 89)

By seeing Ambedkar's boycott in upper caste people freedom fight, Dalits were attacked and their properties were set-fire. The Indian National Congress (INC), from its foundation on 28 December 1885 until the time of Independence of India on 15 August 1947, openly made a poster saying :

....A huge poster was pasted at Timiki, proclaiming, "*Maharonkee khun ke holikhelenge!*" (We will play *holi* with the blood of Mahars!). Due to

the sentiment asserting "Congress rule is our rule," and with the newspapers systematically spreading the emotional propaganda that Ambedkar's party opposed Independence, the Hindus decided to teach a lesson to the Mahars. People of Weaver, Farmer, and Writer castes from the Hindu communities stopped Mahar youth and beat them up when they could be caught alone. But no attacker had the courage to attack a group openly. (GUI 96)

The Indian National Congress never minded about these injustices clamped on Dalits, whereas Ambedkar fought for Individuals rights of Dalits from the British Indian empire. When justice is sought from the ruling government, it was considered a treachery by the upper caste men and women. But the religions' behaviour on discriminations is considered morally correct.

A Brahmin Professor A.N. Deshpande was invited to a Dalit meeting by Vasant Moon. The professor suggested that the Harijan brothers should study high quality Marathi, and other literature, so that the Dalits can express their sufferings in their own literature. The professor was an educated Brahmin; he did not say Dalits are disloyal, but asked Dalits to study literature to express sufferings:

....On 7 November 1953 an audience seated on mats on the dark tiles of the Vitthal Temple Trust

attended the inauguration of the magazine by a Brahman Marathi professor, A.N. Deshpande. It is important to mention here the comments....If our Harijan brothers study thoroughly high-quality literature in Marathi and other languages, and express their joys and sorrows, their dilemmas, in truly living vibrant form in stories, novels, plays, essays, and other literature, then they can enrich Marathi Literature. (*GUI* 144-146)

Vasant and Ramdas Tirpude worked hard to run a hand written magazine *Shuklendu* (Rising Moon) that chronicles Dalits' discrimination, economic deprivation, violence, humiliation, and ridicule. Ambedkar congratulated Vasant's socially committed writing and commented on the article as "Excellent. Well worthy of emulation" (148) in 1953. Again, the copy came to his hand in 1992. This comment of Babasaheb Ambedkar became a seed of inspiration to his team members for more activities.

For the mass conversion into Buddhism on 14 October, 1956 at Deekshabhoomi, Nagpur, his team members worked hard to propagandize the conversion through their magazine and maintained the discipline of the mass. Vasant requested a wooden chair from a Muslim man and got the chair for Ambedkar. After the programme, the chair was handed over to the owner. But Vasant wanted to touch the historical chair.

Hoping, he went to the bungalow near the conversion ground to see the chair. But the Muslim family shifted their residence. The pain of expectation to see the historical chair became a fiasco. Thus, with constant intellectual efforts, Vasant actively worked for his men and women. He was considered as one of the indispensable Dalit intellectual writer in India.

Baby Kamble, in *The Prisons We Broke*, highlighted that the wealthy people are enjoying healthy food and comfortable life. There was no proper food for the poor. She considered Ambedkar as a "protecting weapon" to fight injustices and break the superstitions of Indians. She identified Dalit women's emancipation and worked for her people. Whenever women were ill-treated, She voiced for them. Besides, she wholeheartedly participated Ambedkar's meetings and speeches:

The woman would follow Aaji's advice and give everybody some tea to drink and they would all feel better after drinking the tea....On the the one side, there was the entire society, arrogant and insolent, enjoying wealth and comfort; and on the other side, there were people dying without food, like fish out of water. The three qualities merged and were realised in the form of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar....He was the weapon forged out of the perfect blend of the three qualities of character,

truth and morality, to fight injustice and to break
the chains of slavery that shackled our feet.

(PWB 104)

Babasaheb Ambedkar's birth anniversary was celebrated in 1938. Baby Kamble deeply dedicated her life and soul to the welfare of her people as Ambedkar. His ideology changed the foundation of the nation. Dalits began to identify themselves and fought for their freedom within "free India." However, Ambedkar did not expect to join in the social mainstream society. He documented the sufferings of his people. Kamble acknowledged that Ambedkar solved the issues on the centuries old-caste system within fifty years. She called him "father of God."

Since 1938, Dalits of Phaltan started the tradition of celebrating "Ambedkar Jayanti." Dalit women joined in the Mahad Satyagraha of 1927, and the Nasik Satyagraha in 1956. All these movements targeted to gain social equality.

Ambedkar made law for the Dalits to get their rights in Government, non-government, and political institutions. Similarly, in Tamil Nadu, Periyar E.V.Ramasamy (1879-1973) was the leader of the "Self-Respect Movement or Dravidian Movement" which called for the state, "Dravida Nadu." As Raj Kumar says:

....Dalit women took up their pens and wrote about
their life-experiences, particularly about their

positions in families and communities that women-related issues got highlighted properly in Dalit literature. (239)

As far the Dalit autobiographies are concerned, there were written in their own dialects. Namadeo Dhasal opines that the use of dialects should be welcomed because the dialects portray the authentic feelings of Dalits, "Any language is beautiful because it reflects the human mind. Language is an important part of social life. So every spoken language should be a part of literature..." (qtd. in Raj Kumar 244). Baby Kamble followed Baba's advice verbatim, to the best of her ability, "Today, I am the president of Mahatma Phule Dnyan Vikas Prasarak Sanstha and I serve the community in this capacity..." (PWB 135).

Baby Kamble notes the arrival of Ambedkar on the scene and the initial meetings in the 1930s that were organised during religious fairs and the debates that followed within the community. The important contributions of women in this initial phase of the Ambedkarite movement are underscored. The *Kuldevata* (family deity), god Khandoba at Jejuri, was believed to be the saviour of the community. Mahars from all parts of the region came walking in groups from long distances to this fair and Baby Kamble remembers the words of Ambedkar:

'My brothers and sisters, the young and old, women and children....You do not have adequate clothing on your bodies, no food to eat and no proper houses to live in. You did not have footwear and yet you walked this distance to come here. The god should have at least inquired about your well-being. If he cannot do anything for you why do you go through so much of trouble for him?' (PWB 64)

Baby Kamble recalled how this speech of Babasaheb gave tremendous courage to the women. Bhikabai, her grand aunt, climbed up onto the stage and stood in front of Babasaheb and began to deliver a speech. She appealed to all the women to follow Ambedkar's advice and to educate their children, to give up eating dead cattle, and to work towards the betterment of the community.

In school, Baby Kamble faced hostility from the "savarna" girls. They were facing Mahar girls for the first time in their lives. When they had to walk past Dalits, they would run for their lives, shrieking with disgust as if the girls were rotten and oozing with pus. The teacher had given them places at the door away from the blackboard in a corner. After school, they would go in a group to drink water at the school tap. The savarna girls would come in large groups and try to obstruct their path to the tap. Thus, Baby Kamble struggled to acquire education. The traditional faiths on

culture and religion never gave her opportunities. She became victim of Child-Marriage. But, her autobiography gave an opportunity to dig out the unique legacy of Dalitness.

In *Ooru Keri*, Siddalingaiah understood his role in educating Dalits after getting knowledge of Ambedkar. He gave speeches on Ambedkar and his role in Dalits' liberation. He also started Night-School for Dalit slum children around Bangalore. The education was given in free cost. As a President of Kannada Book Authority, Siddalingaiah said "More than four lakhs books were distributed the needy children of Karnataka" (Personal Interview, 8 Feb. 2012).

Siddalingaiah wrote revolutionary poems and had delivered them in his speeches. He first emerged on the public scene as a student leader in the 1970s, a period when Dalit rights issues had begun triggering conflict with the upper caste people. However, Siddalingaiah did not join active politics then because he had too much work as a Post-Graduate. Although he is a poet, it is his autobiography *Ooru Keri* that is shaping the literary thinking of researchers. Siddalingaiah walked to many parts of Karnataka to establish Dalit Sangharsh Samiti movement (DSS). Through this movement, he brought out Dalits' basic issues to the government. He first concentrated on his fellow students.

Siddalingaiah was misused by politicians. Prof. M.D Najundaswamy asked Siddalingaiah and his followers to through

"handbills" at Vidhana Soundha visitors' gallery where Ministers and Legislators participated. After that, police arrested Siddalingaiah and his friends. They were put in the lock-up. At midnight, they were released. He understood the political drama:

He once told us to enter the Vidhana Soundha visitor' gallery and fling handbills into the assembly....Our handbills swooped down on the ministers and legislators sitting below....All doors to the visitors' gallery were closed. Five or six security men held each of us....He came to see them in the lock-up, ordered snacks for us, spoke encouraging words, and left. We were released by midnight. (OKA 85)

He organised Dalit students to make a procession towards Cubbon Park for demanding Dalits' hostel and repairing the existing hostels. The then Chief Minister D.Devaraj Urs (1915-1982) is particularly remembered for his reforms that targeted the Scheduled Castes and the Other Backward Classes of Karnataka. He accepted Dalit students' demands. Thus, Siddalingaiah sought political and literary solution to upgrade the welfare of the Dalits in Karnataka:

The procession reached Cubbon Park, where we held a public meeting. Police officials took the initiative to arrange for our delegation to meet

chief minister Devaraj Urs....He called his personal secretary J C Lynn and instructed him to quickly sort out whatever problems we might go and complain about....Our problems were solved one by one. Our meeting paved the way for the construction of new buildings beside the two hostels on M G Road...(OKA 89)

Siddalingaiah got an opportunity to publish his poems in the magazine *Shudra*. Shudra Srinivas, the editor of the magazine asked Siddalingaiah to translate the speeches of Babasaheb Ambedkar into Kannada language. Most of the upper caste people thought that Ambedkar was against independence. In order to make clear, Ambedkar's speeches were translated into Kannada language to reach the mass:

Shudra Srinivas used to visit our hostel. He published my poems in the magazine he edited, *Shudra*. My name appeared as Holageri Siddalingaiah. Once when I was in dread, he filled me with courage. He said U R Anantha Murthy had asked him to get me to translate an Ambedkar speech. I translated Ambedkar's speech against political orthodoxy into Kannada. That too was published in *Shudra*.(OKA 98)

His movement began to progress. As far as his education was concerned, he got first class in M.A., Kannada language,

and won the D.L.Narashimhachar Gold Medal. He was honoured with the post of Research Assistant at the Kannada Study Centre. In this way, Siddalingaiah's struggles made him self-empowered and got a desire for formal education from the beginning. As years rolled, he considered that learning to read and write are the first steps toward self-empowerment. In his personal interview Siddalingaiah said that "I visit villages of Karnataka and give speeches on caste oppressions. I give moral support to Dalits" (Interview 8 Feb. 2012). Thus, his narratives provide a insight into the exploitations of Dalits and their emancipation.

Bama came across numerous caste problems in her village and Christian convents. She was alienated by the upper caste people and Hindu fundamentalists. In *Karukku*, she documented her sufferings in Dalit dialect of Tamil language. She did not give names of people, churches, and schools. All characters were anonymously referred to. She did not mention her brother's name, but "Anna," or upper caste people like "Naicker." It is her hope and perseverance that enabled her to got her B.Ed. degree. Bama, as a teacher and activist, wished to bring unity among Dalits and fight caste oppressions. Bama says:

....It seems that our society is divided into those who toil, and those who sit down and feast. They have separated out those whom they consider unfit

to touch, pushed them to one side and marginalized them; they make them work like machines yet abuse them unjustly, never allowing them to make any progress. I don't know when such atrocities will ever end. Is it likely that he who finds his comfort by exploiting us will ever change, or ever allow the system to change?(*Karukku* 68-69)

Bama's father Susairaj, being an Army man, strictly wanted his children to be well educated. Raj Gauthaman, her elder brother encouraged Bama to become an eye opener of her visionless men and women. Since her childhood, Bama inherited a peripheral knowledge about the caste. If an upper caste person does anything wrong, it is accepted as pride of caste. But, it is not in the case of a Dalit. He or she will be immediately accused of Dalitness of immaturity.

Bama, being active for her people, was transferred to various schools to disintegrate her association with Dalits. As a result, her soul became like a *Moringa* tree which is always prone to be broken in the gale:

At the time that I entered the convent, I was like the strong core of a teak tree. Both in mind and in body, I was as firm and steadfast as that. But when I came out, I had lost all my strength, and was as feeble as a murunga tree that blows over in the wind. It was only after I entered the convent that

I fell prey to every illness and disease. My mind too had been buffeted and knocked about, so that I was only living a half-life or a quarter-life. In such a diminished state, how could I be of service?....For the time being, I cannot see my way ahead. Yet I believe it is possible to live a meaningful life, a life that is useful to a few others. I comfort myself with the thought that rather than live with a fraudulent smile, it is better to lead a life weeping real tears.

(*Karukku* 103-104)

Karukku actually was written in the post-tenure of the Prime Minister, V.P. Singh [(Vishwanath Pratap Singh, 1931-2008) who was the 7th Prime Minister of India from 2 December 1989 to 10 November 1990]. Unlike other Dalit writers, Bama did not bring political issues in her autobiography. As Raj Kumar said:

Incidentally, the Tamil version of *Karukku* was published at a time when post-colonial India was witnessing a severe caste and communal violence due to the Mandal agitation and demolition of the historic Babri Mosque at Ayodhya by the Hindu fundamentalists. It was also the time when the V.P. Singh government at the centre celebrated Ambedkar's birth centenary on a large scale to propound and

propagate Ambedkars' ideas and ideologies and to secure equality and social justice for the weaker sections of the Indian society. It comes as no surprise that none of these events mentioned above is even remotely referred to either in the text or in the afterword which Bama especially wrote in the English translation. Nevertheless, throughout her narrative, Bama vociferously condemns all forms of oppression: be it caste, class, or gender...(229)

John C.B. Webster, et al, in their study *From Role to Identity: Dalit Christian Women in Transition*, found that Dalit women define their roles in Hindu society, Christian traditions and Dalit traditions, "From just adhering to a social role, to having an individual identity is definitely a revolutionary step very much desired by Bama and other Dalit worker..." (qtd. in Raj Kumar 238). Thus, Bama portrayed Dalit's culture and dialect as medium expression in her autobiography with a few myths and legends. Along side Bama's life, her expressions attracted the world readers to explore the aesthetic qualities.

In *The Scar*, Gunasekaran remained as an artist and writer. He was never be found in political sphere. In his interview, he said "I write and stage dramas to the liberation of Dalits" (3).

I was then doing my B.A. The Trichy All India Radio would often broadcast the folk songs I had sung....Before and after the broadcast of my song they would announce the song was sung by Elayankudi K.A.Gunasekaran, I had the opportunity to sing on the radio while still at the Sivagana College because of poet Meera. In both my village and college, I had a very good name because of this.(52)

Gunasekaran works on Folk theatre (Music and Dance), Music in theatre, and writes and directs plays. They are read and viewed in all parts of the world by Tamil people. sHe says in his recent article, "Folk Arts in India:"

The researchers in arts, art-connoisseurs and patrons of arts, should look into cultural aspects of folk art-forms and should not be downcast. These art-forms must be promoted and supported by all and should not be overlooked. (64)

The growth of Dalit writings are groundbreaking achievement in recent years. Despite, provisions for compulsory education, Dalits were still in many places denied to graduate. After Babasaheb Ambedkar Dalit mass got opportunity to study and improve their walks of life. They also began to write their sufferings and humiliations. They feel writings as "weapon."

Gunasekaran makes intellectual services to the students, commoner, and governments' institutions. He has been actively advising fellow men and women to revive Tamil and Dalit folk arts. He sings, "The learned are celebrated wherever they go, but today/The learned are received with contempt wherever they go" (70). This song was for the unemployed graduates and helpless by degree, and a pastoral song with relation to Dalit culture. As Gunasekaran sings:

The sun and moon will soon light up the world,
In the dead of the night, in the sandalwood hill,
I yearn to make you mine,

Hey, my April thrush – Hey, my April Peacock. (71)

Though Dalits were deprived of formal education, they were rich in myths and legends. Through oral and folk, Dalits have been enriching their generation. They also express their happy and suffering in their own medium. Thanane songs, music, free dance and Parai are Dalits popular aesthetic in recent years. As James C. Scott's "weapons of the weak" (qtd. in Rajkumar 247), Dalit themselves began to assert their identity through the "weapon" of writing. Prakash Louis, in the article "Dalit Assertion in North India: A View from Below," notes:

Dalit assertion, liberation and emancipation are themes that have come to the centre stage of the current sociological discourse. With the emergence

of Dalit assertion, the social scientists are forced to take note of caste discrimination. The human rights activists are also directed to look... (121)

Some specific socio-political and economic factors provide a space and scope for Dalit assertion. Hence, conducting a research on Dalit literary work is beneficial things. The authors deliberately described and explained the social interactions which happen in the real life without discrimination. As a result, real social life is the main source of the author's inspiration in creating literary works which is possibly taken from their real social life or their response toward the phenomena happens in social life. By doing so, the society will be more concerned with every benefit of the social phenomena. Every author can purposively express his or her response by assembling the message through his or her literary work.

Seeing these social interests, V.S. Naipaul's *Prologue to an Autobiography* expresses his longing for writing. He too was "deprived of background of knowledge" (118) as Linda Anderson said. Gunasekaran's art and writings were brought out to liberate Dalits from caste oppressions. Researchers from various parts of India are translating his works into English and other languages. As Siddalingaiah said, "...the myth and legends sometimes reveal the agony of Dalits. So, we

could not ignore village Gods that too Dalit deities”
(Personal Interview, 8 Feb. 2012).

Thus, the civil-heroes Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and Gunasekaran reflected the greatness of Dalit’s history and recordless facts about the deities in their autobiographies. Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and Buddhism attracted Dalits in certain principles. The oral transformation myths and legends sustain the Dalits’ culture with their own characteristics. The “deprived Dalithood” was constantly revived in their writings and became successful in their efforts to educate fellow men and women in the contemporary Indian.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

As Richard D. Altick remarked, "...almost every literary work is attended by a host of outside circumstances which, once we expose and explore them, suffuse it additional meaning" (qtd. in Guerin 53-54). Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life*, Vasant Moon's *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*, Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography*, Bama's *Karukku*, and K.A. Gunasekaran's *The Scar* documented the constant and soul-numbing social and legal injustices in India. They reflect enhanced level of social and political awareness among the exploited community. The idea of Dalit autobiographies is the articulation of oppressed being and text of oppressed people. The authors' discourses empower the Dalits beyond time and borders.

As Wellek says, "A writer is not only influenced by society; he or she influences it. Art does not merely reproduce life but also shapes it" (qtd. in Prasetyo Dwi Martanto 2). Dianoia – life of the authors are authentically reflected in their literary works like a looking-glass that reflects the authors' society.

The influence of Ambedkar is overwhelming in the discourses and highlighted the traumas of the Dalits. Social

influences were also depicted in autobiographies that inform the world readers about the Dalits' status in India. Social realism includes critiques of beliefs and values, as opposed to the correspondence of depictions to (pre-existing) ideas about "lifelike representations," says Jeff Adams (10).

Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and K.A. Gunasekaran survived from poverty, atrocities, and social and legal injustices. After achieving personal dreams, they probed deep into the various facts and facets of society. Their social consciousness, self-respect, and vision of future enrich Dalit literature and identity.

The final fact derived from this study is that these autobiographies highlighted social realities that have been kept as the central theme and gave the real description of Indian Dalits. As William Henry Hudson suggested that the importance of literature and people, in *An Outline History of English Literature*:

It is true that a nation's literature is made up of the works of individual writers, and that for the ordinary purposes of study these writers may be detached from their surroundings and treated separately. Be we cannot get a history of such literature unless and until each one has been put into his place in the sequence of things and

considered with reference to that great body of literary production of which his [writers] work must now be regarded as a part. (v)

In the same way, Dalit autobiographies are being appreciated for the social purpose. They portray the surroundings of Dalits and their social behaviour in the Indian society. *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life* discovers the degraded facts of Dalits. Omprakash interrogates the religions, supremacy, exploitations, and injustices. Though, he was deprived of identity and basic freedom of life, he never failed to find the answer for those entities.

Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography says the tragic life of Dalits in middle India during the freedom struggle. There were rivalries between caste, politics, and religions. When Dalits trespass from the social stratifications, they are beaten and killed by upper caste people. Vasant Moon authentically expressed in his struggle and tale of survival in his autobiography.

The Prisons We Broke is memory of Baby Kamble; rather it is an autobiography of Dalit women. They were oppressed by religion, caste, and sex. Culturally, Dalits are not given opportunity in education, Dalit women, in particular, are given less important and the most vulnerable to degradation. *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* is the reflection of Siddalingaiah's life in village and slum of Bangalore. He

immigrated to city for survival but exploited by politician. However, he struggled and established great name through writings. He is active in politics, social and writing.

Karukku is a testimony of social behaviour of upper caste people from the perspective of caste and converted religion and its faith. It is a voice of Dalits' trauma. Bama recorded her wounded psyche and it is representing the people's psyche. She advocates self-upliftment of her people. *The Scar* unfolds the deep psychological conflicts and the anecdotes of Christian, Hindu, and Muslim prejudices towards Parayan. Broadly, poverty, untouchability, gender discriminations, exploitations by landlords, and traumas of Gunasekaran are the themes of his autobiography. It also give some references to the historical incidents of India.

In this way, the portrayal of socioeconomic conditions like poor settlement and shelter, lack of drinking water, electricity, and hospital facilities are traced to support the analyses of the research. In schools, employment institutions, public places, travel, and politics, Dalits were discriminated.

The atrocities based on caste gave sequences of the text for the autobiographies. Dalits were killed, and Dalit women were raped and killed. When these victims voice against the social and legal injustices, they were also treated as mere animals.

The significances of Dalit identity in the caste hegemonic society are brought out in the autobiographers. Besides, Dalits understand their identity by reading the works of Mulk Raj Anand, Vijay Tendulkar, Premchand, Rabinthranath Tagore and Ambedkar in religion and education. Dalit men and women actively participated in Ambedkar's ideology and considered as "God of Dalits."

Ravikumar traced Srinivasan's words with the British Emperor. The discourse was significant while connecting Dalit autobiographies for the mass emancipation. Rettamalai Srinivasan [From the autobiography of Dalit activist, politician and freedom fighter of Tamil Nadu, Diwan Bahadur Rettamalai Srinivasan (1859-1945) who participated in the Round Table Conference (1930) in England,] says:

I got an opportunity to speak again with the emperor. He asked me about untouchability. When I said the high caste will not touch the low caste, he asked me, "won't a high caste help a low caste to his feet even if he falls on the road?" when I said, "he won't." The emperor shocked, and he said, "I will never allow this in my empire."

(qtd. in Ravikumar's Introduction xv)

Of course, British Government offered basic advantages like education, employment, and franchise. In addition to political identity, the Dalit discourses highlight caste

based problems in the national and international forums. The writers and researchers were brought out to understand the social discrimination and debated on the issues. Dalit literature has been producing new forms of intellectual representation in various languages. It voices social and political consciousness and monitors the Dalits' welfare.

A sense of happiness is found in upper caste people's autobiography. Whereas, each Dalit autobiography is recorded a life that experienced caste atrocities and discriminations that also continue beyond the death of the autobiographer. Due to extreme and cruel caste-based discriminations in Hindu religion, many Dalit men and women have changed their religion to Christianity and Buddhism for their liberation. Those who have changed their religion also face such discrimination in new faith. In spite of deprivation, many of Dalits have received opportunities to get good education and jobs. For example some Dalit women work as nurses in hospitals and clinics run by Christian missionary. However, they were in due course marginalised.

Dalit's experienced narratives are very distinct and vary from the non-Dalit narratives in number of ways. The upper caste people's autobiographies end with body unsettled emotions. Whereas, a Dalit autobiography ends with uncertain future of author. As Raj Kumar concluded:

....The fact that every title of Dalit autobiography has subtitle that refers to an untouchable life makes it clear that it is not yet time for any Dalit autobiographer to celebrate his/her freedom, the most desirable part of one's life. The search is still on. (260)

With the influence of various Western literature, writers, and politicians, these Dalits authors recorded their experienced life stories in order to make awareness among fellow-Dalits. The text and content stand in neck and neck as the idea of "founders of discursivity." They are triggering opportunities for further research on the Dalit literature for younger generation. In the critical work "What is an Author?," Michel Foucault stated:

...in the course of the nineteenth century...more uncommon, kind of author, whom one should confuse with neither the "great" literary authors...we shall call those who belong in this last group "founder of discursivity." They are unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts...have established an endless possibility of discourse. (206)

Indeed, all these authors advocated education and self-reliance. As Bheemaiah, in the article "Dialectics of Caste Culture: A Social Crisis in Indian Nation," says, "Caste is not physical monster. It is more of a psychological phenomenon. Every Indian is imbued with belief in fate and implanted with caste consciousness" (457).

The social analysis of these Dalit autobiographers leads to the understanding of contemporary Indian Dalits through the discourses. Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, Baby Kamble, Siddalingaiah, Bama, and K.A. Gunasekaran belong to various states and languages. But, they were rooted in Dalit culture and race. They also give optimistic measurements for the young generation.

The real social life is the main source of the author's inspiration in creating a literary work. By doing so, the society will be more concerned with every benefit of the social phenomena. Every author can purposively express his or her response by assembling the message through his or her literary work. What stands out in the end is that, Dalit autobiographies are sublime creations, which bring about lamentable pains and sufferings and the evolution of personal consciousness beyond human understanding.

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Appendix I

Glossaries

Joothan: An Untouchable's Life

Abey (pronounced ahbey)	:	Hey
Abey, chuhre (pronounced Ahbey, Churey)	:	Hey, you, Chuhre
Adi	:	Literally, from the beginning
Adivasi	:	An indigenous person; aborigine.
Ashtami	:	Eighth day of a Hindu festival.
Asprishya	:	Untouchable
Avarnas	:	Those outside the varna system; untouchables
Bahu	:	Daughter-in-law
Baithak	:	The outer room or space that men use as an area to meet and chat.
Barat	:	The bridegroom's party.
Baratis	:	Members of the bridegroom's party.
Basti	:	Literally, a settlement; place where people have settled in villages and in towns or squatted without official sanction in towns. Often people of the same caste live side by side.
Behen	:	Sister (whether by blood or courtesy.)
Bhabhi	:	Older brother's wife.
Bhaiyya	:	Brother (whether by blood or courtesy).
Bhangi	:	Untouchable.
Biri	:	Indian cigarette, raw tobacco wrapped tightly around a piece of sal leaf.
Brahmanas	:	Commentaries on the Vedas, the most sacred Hindu texts.
Bua	:	Father's sister, or paternal aunt.
Chacha	:	Father's younger brother.
Chachi	:	Wife of father's brother.
Chandala	:	Untouchable.
Charpai	:	Rope-string cot.
Chaturdashi	:	The fourth day of a Hindu festival.
Chaturvarna	:	Four gradations in which castes are placed: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras, arranged in a hierarchical order.
Chowdhurain	:	The landowner's wife.
Chowdhuri	:	Landowner.
Dacoit	:	Gang members who rob and murder.
Depressed	:	British government term for those castes who

Classes	:	were just above the Dalits, not untouchable but still very deprived; now referred as other backward classes, or OBCs.
Devi	:	Goddess.
Devta	:	God.
Dwija	:	Twice-born status of the upper castes after performing thread ceremony, or upanayan.
Gauna	:	The ceremony marking consummation of the marriage, when the young bride is sent to the bridegroom's home; at the time of the wedding the bride may be too young for sexual relations.
Ghazal	:	An Urdu lyrical poem, usually sung.
Gita	:	<i>The Gita</i> , or <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> , translates to English as the Song of God and originally was part of the epic called the Mahabharata, but is became a separate book many centuries ago and is perhaps the most sacred book of the Hindus, expounding the moral law.
Goonda	:	Hoodlum.
Gotra	:	The name of a large kinship group of many families within a caste who supposedly share a common ancestor; the name must be given when any ritual is performed.
Gur	:	Molasses
Gurudakshina	:	Teacher's tribute.
Gyana	:	Knowledge
Jamadar	:	Sweeper.
Jatakas	:	Roughly six hundred texts of Buddhist litersture that focus on the incarnations of the Buddha before he attained Buddhahood and provide a wealth of social history.
Jati	:	Caste.
Ji	:	Suffix added to names as courtesy, as in chachaji.
Jowar	:	Coarse grain, like millet.
Khaddar	:	Handloom shirt.
Kothi	:	A substantial house.
Maharshi	:	"great sage," someone who impresses by his wisdom and ethical standards.
Maidan	:	Huge open field; public park.
Mama	:	Mother's brother
Mausa	:	Husband of father's sister
Murga	:	Rooster position, formed by squatting on the haunches, then drawing the arms through the inner thighs and pulling the head down so the hands can grasp the ears; a painful, constricted position.
Nanad	:	Husband's sister.
Nanad-bhabhi	:	As used here, the affectionate relations

relationship	:	between the wife and her sister-in-law (husband's sister), a relationship that traditionally is a source of great tension, as one is a daughter of the house and the other a daughter-in-law.
Nat samrat	:	The best actor; literally, the emperor of the theater.
Navami	:	Ninth day of a Hindu festival.
OBCs	:	Acronym Other Backward Classes, an official government designation for certain castes; see Depressed Classes.
Parantha	:	A kind of fried bread sometimes suffed with vegetables.
Pattal	:	Leaf plate.
Phupi	:	Husband of father's sister.
Pooris	:	Bread that is deep fried and puffs up when hot.
Pradhan	:	Village chief
Puchha	:	Exorcism
Puja	:	Worship of a deity or god in the form of a statue, an idol.
<i>Ramayana</i>	:	Sanskrit epic written by the poet Valmiki in the third century B.C..
<i>Ramcharitmanas</i>	:	Later version of the <i>Ramayana</i> that was written by Tulsidas and is popular in northern and central India.
Sahib	:	A person who is n authority or of a higher social status.
Samskara	:	Hindu rites and rituals that are a part of the upper-caste Hindu's life.
Savarnas	:	Those within the varna system.
Scheduled Caste (SC)	:	Official term for untouchables entitled to benefits under affirmative action policies.
Scheduled Tribes (STs)	:	Adivasis, or tribal people entitled to special benefits under affirmative action policies.
Shairi	:	Urdu poetry
Shakti puja	:	Offering made to the mother goddess Durga.
Shohare	:	Father-in-law, used as abuse.
Shuddhi	:	Hindu purification ceremony to reconvert Christian or Muslim converts.
Tai	:	Wife of father's older brother.
Tandav	:	Lord Shiva's dance of destruction
Tantric	:	Someone who knows traditional black magic and casts spells, practicing a debased form of the ancient art of tantra.
Tau	:	Father's older brother.
Upanayana	:	The sacred thread ceremony.
Varna	:	Literally, color; gradation within the chaturvarna system.

- Vida : Departure; here, bride's departure to her husband's home.
- Yagna : Fire ritual of animal sacrifices and gifts to Brahmins

Growing up Untouchable in India

- Acharya : A spiritual guide or teacher. Also used as a title for a learned man. P.K.Atire (q.v., Biography) was known as Acharya Atire for his broad intellectual contributions to Maharashtrian culture.
- Adivasi : The "first inhabitants"; a term used for "tribal" peoples who generally lived in hilly areas, were not urbanized, and did not generally worship Hindu gods or follow Hindu practices.
- Avatar : Usually used for one of the reincarnated forms of Vishnu. Here simply used for the appearance of a person in a particular sort of dress.
- BABASAHEB : Literally Father-Master. Affectionate and respectful title given to Ambedkar around 1928. Often shortened to Baba.
- bai : An informal honorific, as in Purnabai. Also used in address for "Woman".
- BAMCEF : Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation. Founded by Kanshi Ram, who since has become a national figure as the leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party, BAMCEF is an influential organization of government employees that undertakes social service work.
- Bengalis : Migrants to Nagpur from Bengal or residents of that area. Note that outsiders are given area names with no reference to caste and that in Bengal, Mahars seem to be caste-free.
- Bhajan : Translated at times as "hymn-singing session," a bhajan is more properly a session of singing of the songs of the bhakti movement, known in Maharashtra as the Warkari Panth.
- Bhakti : Devotional religion. The bhakti movement refers to the historical phenomenon of a series of poet-saints in most areas of India. In the Marathi-speaking area, the movement was known as Warkari Panth and brought thousands of pilgrims to Pandharpur and resulted in temples to the gods of

- Pandharpur, Vithoba, and Rukmini, becoming widespread throughout the area. The movement began in the thirteenth century, and the pilgrimage continues today.
- Bhatji : Term of address to a Brahman priest
- Bhikshu. : A monk in the Buddhist religion
- Bhim. : Affectionate nickname for Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Also can be a reference to the Bhim of the Mahabhaata epic, the strongest of the five bothers.
- Bhoodan Movement : Gandhian influence was continued by Vinoba Bhave, who after Gandhi's death lunched a bhoodan (literally "land gift") movement to provide land to the landless.
- Bhosle : The princely house of Nagpur, which was annexed in 1853 by the British with little reaction. However, the Bhosles and their palace seem to still be of importance. Some family members appear herein as royalty, such as in the procession of Raghuji Raja.
- Bidi : Cheap Indian cigarette; tobacco in a hand-rolled leaf. In spite of the idea that Mahar touch was polluting, Mahars were heabily involved in the Bidi home industry.
- Brahmans : Often spelled Brahmins. The ritually higherst caste; dominant in religious, education, and literary matters because of their ancient religious rights and their literacy.
- The Buddha and His Dhamma : Published posthumously this book, written in English by Ambedkar, contains his rationalist humanist interpretation of the Buddha's life and teachings. It has been reprinted in the *Dr. Babasahed Ambedker: Writings and Speeches series*, edited by Vasant Moon, who has also published a booklet of Pali sources for the volume.
- Buddha jayanti : The celebration of the Buddha's traditional birthday.
- Chaudar tank : A pool of water in the Brahman sector of Mahad, a city south of Bombay (now Mumbai)that was the site of a 1927 satyagraha (q.v.) of drink water there according to a new Bombay Legislature resolution. When Untouchables were beaten back and the tank was purified, a later conference was held there at which sections of the orthodox Hindu law-book, the *Manusmriti*, that decreed restrictions and punishments for Shudras were burned. Mahad

- is held to be the beginning of the mass Ambedkar movement.
- Chawl : Usually a large apartment building of one-room homes, with central water and toilet facilities. Hundreds were built in British days to house the workers flooding into the cities that offered employment in mills or docks.
- Congress : the Indian National Congress. Founded in 1885 as India's first and longest-lasting nationalist movement, the Congress became a political party in the 1937 election. Gandhi was the most important Congress leader, along with Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel, from 1920 on.
- Dal : See Samata Sainik Dal.
- Dalit : Downtrodden, oppressed. Used first by Jotiba Phule in the mid-nineteenth century. The word gained currency as self-chosen, proud name with the early 1970s development of the Dalit Panthers and Dalit literature. Today it has replaced most other names in the vocabulary of politically aware ex-Untouchables and the press.
- Darshan : To experience a sight of a god, a shrine, a religious person, or even a city that would bring merit or a blessing to the one looking.
- Dhobi : A washer-man. Also a caste name
- Dhoti : Traditional male garment; an unsewn length of cloth wrapped around the lower body.
- Dhyamba-tukaram : The chant of warkaris on pilgrimage or in bhajans, which refers to the founder of the Vithoba cult, Dnyaneshwar, and the most popular saint-poet, Tukaram.
- Diksha : conversion or ordination. Dhamma diksha refers to the conversion to Buddhism of Dr. Ambedkar and his followers.
- Diwali : A popular fall festival that begins with puja to Lakshmi (the goddess of wealth) for economic well-being. Known as the festival of Lights in the tradition of lighting the way of Ram, Sita, and Lakshman back to Ayodhya from Lanka.
- Durgah : Muslim tomb, usually that of a Sufi saint or a fakir
- Fakir : Muslim holy man, usually a wanderer.
- Ganpati : The elephant-headed god much beloved in Maharashtra; also called Ganesh. The public festival begun by Lokmanya Tilak in the late nineteenth century is one of the central

- urban religious festivals even today. After a ten-day exhibition and a procession, Ganpati images are immersed in a body of water.
- Gayatri Mantra : One of the holiest of mantras from the Rig Veda. It means "Let us think on the splendor of the sun so that our minds might be inspired." It was supposed to be uttered only by the three upper classes, not by Shudras or Untouchables.
- Ghee : Clarified butter. Considered an expensive but necessary delicacy in upper-class Hindu homes.
- Gita : A reference to the *Bhagavad Gita*, the sermon of Krishna in the Mahabharata that is one of the most important religious texts of contemporary Hinduism. Expositions of the Gita were so important that a "Gita ground" took the name of the text.
- Gurkhas : Nepalese soldiers in the British army, known for their fighting skill.
- guruji : A title used for an admired teacher or elder.
- Harijan and Harijan Sevak Sangh. : People or children of God and the organization for service to them. "Harijan" was Gandhi's euphemism for Untouchable, rejected by Ambedkar as patronizing and useless but until recently used by most caste Hindu and the press and some Untouchables.
- Hindi : The language of Northern India, related to Marathi and spoken widely in the Vidarbha area along with Marathi.
- Holi : A festival of fun and frolic held at the beginning of spring, involving a holi fire and a reversal of many normal roles. Colored water or powder is squirted or thrown around freely.
- hututu : A traditional game of running and tag, competitive and very popular, played without any equipment.
- ILP : Independent Labour Party, founded by Ambedkar in 1935. Fifteen of the seventeen candidates for legislative seats in the Bombay Legislature put up by the party in the 1937 election were successful, and included caste Hindus as well as Scheduled Castes. The party was the second-largest opposition to the Indian National Congress in the 1937-1939 Bombay legislature and

		proposed legislation on labor as well as Scheduled Caste matters
Independence	:	India became independent of British rule on 15 th August 1947.
Janata	:	Ambedkar's very influential newspaper.
Janmashtami	:	The day celebrated as the birthday of the god Krishna.
jayanti	:	In Hinduism, the anniversary of an incarnation of Vishnu, celebrated publicly. Also adapted to non-Hindu celebrations, such as the birthday of the Buddha and the birthday of Ambedkar.
Kanoba	:	A god of the Vidarbha region, considered to be a form of Krishna
Kartik	:	A month of the Hindu calendar bridging October-November.
Karve's case	:	R.D.Karve's writing on the necessity for population control was considered obscene because of its mention of birth control
Khokho	:	A traditional Indian game, played without equipment
Kirtan	:	The celebration and praising of a god through song and sermon. An important part of bhakti devotion. Kirtankars were famous for their singing interspersed with messages.
Konkanastha	:	Meaning "from the Konkan," which is the coastal strip south of Mumbai (Bombay).The term usually refers to Chitpavan Brahmans, a high caste of achievers who originated from the Konkan.
Kulkarni	:	The village accountant responsible to the government, almost always a Brahman.
Kumkum	:	The red mark on the forehead of married women.
lathi	:	The wooden weapon of the police in India, deadly in lathi charge.
linga	:	The phallic symbol that represents the god Shiva.
Madhya Pradesh	:	The contemporary name for the "middle state" of India. Before States Reorganization after Independence, Central Provinces and Berar was the British state that included portions of present day Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.
Madrasis	:	Migrants from the southern state of Madras now called Tamil Nadu.
Maha Bodhi Society	:	Founded in Calcutta in the nineteenth century by Anagarika Dharmapala of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the Maha Bodhi Society has

- at times been cordial to the Ambedkar Buddhist movement, but also is suspected of treating Buddhism as a branch of Hinduism.
- Mahabharata : The great Indian epic, codified between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. The story of the Pandava brothers (including Bhim) and the battle between them and the Kauravas is known to all Indians.
- Mahanubhav : A bhakti devotional movement of the thirteenth century still active today, but more marginalized than the better-known Pandharpur movement of the warkaris devoted to Vitthal. Basically egalitarian, the sect was begun by Chakradhar and has been chiefly studied by V.B.Kolte (a teacher in Moon's narrative) and more recently by Anne Feldhaus.
- Mahaparinivan : The death or the great departing of the Buddha from his earthly life.
- Mahar Regiment : At the urging of Dr.Ambedkar, the British government in India created the Mahar Regiment during World War II. Mahars had served in the British army during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, before it was reorganized to disqualify Untouchables.
- Maharpura : Literally, city of the Mahars. The section of a village in which Mahars live is known as the Maharwada. Moon's vasti in the Sitabardi area in Nagpur was known as the Maharpura until the conversion to Buddhism.
- Malguzar : Rent receivers recognized by the British as
- landlords : a landowning class.
- mantra : A phrase or spell used in meditation or healing
- Marwaris : Rajasthani business-class migrants, very important economically in Vidarbha.
- Matamai : Also known as Mariai in the Marathi-speaking area. The goddess of pestilence, especially smallpox, who is traditionally cared for by Mahars. She is represented by a stone, not an image.
- matriculation : The examination that must be passed to signify high-school graduation. Marks indicate a first, second, or third-class pass or failure.
- Moharram : A Muslim festival mourning the death of Muhammad's grandson in the battle of Karbala. Many Hindus took part in the procession, and a young boy often wore the

		stripes of a tiger as he drummed.
Mumbai	:	Marathi name for the city of Bombay, now officially used in all languages.
Nagpanchmi	:	Festival of the snakes, celebrated all over Maharashtra
namaskar	:	The traditional Hindu greeting with folded hands. Moon's mother greets the sun in this fashion.
Nandi	:	The bull of Shiva, almost always represented in Shaiva temples
Nasik satyagraha	:	From 1930-1935, Mahars attempted to enter the Kalaram Temple in Nasik or to join the temple procession. Congress opposed this satyagraha for temple entry. Failure to win temple-entry rights preceded Ambedkar's announcement at nearby Yeola in 1935 that he would not die a Hindu.
pan	:	A betel leaf filled with various substances, usually chewed after a meal. pan shops are found everywhere in India.
panch, panchayat	:	A council of leaders, either caste or village, traditionally five (panch) in number.
pandit	:	Now an English word meaning an expert or scholar. Traditionally a master of some scholarly or musical body of knowledge. Used for all Kashmiri Brahmins, as in the title of the first prime minister of India, pandit Nehru.
Parsis	:	A group that came from Persia around the eighth century, settled in Gujarat, and in the nineteenth century entered into British businesses and then began their own businesses. Here they appear as mill owners and founders of medical clinics. Since they were Zoroastrian by religion and outside caste, they employed many Mahars in their homes.
Patil	:	Village headman. In the more loosely structured caste society of Vidarbha, mahars could bear the surname patil; normally it indicates a maratha.
Peshwa	:	A Persian term for prime minister. The de facto ruler of the Maratha Kingdom in the eighteenth century, the last Peshwa was defeated near Pune by the British in 1818 with an army that included many Mahars.
puja	:	Ritual worship of a god or goddess. Also a ritual that marks a life stage, or in the case of Satyanarayan puja, a new venture or

- a need for an auspicious result of some proposed action.
- Pune Pact : The 1932 agreement between Ambedkar and Gandhi in which Ambedkar gave up a separate electorate for Untouchables that would have allowed them to elect their own representatives (as the Muslims did) and secured additional reserved places in the legislatures. The pact took place in the Yeravda Jail in Pune, where Gandhi was held and was signed to prevent Gandhi's death by fasting.
- Puranas : Collections of stories in Sanskrit, written chiefly in the first millennium C.E., which are the basic source for the stories about the Hindu gods and goddesses.
- Qawwali : A song genre stemming from the religious music of the Sufis, Muslim mystics, but popular throughout north India in all societies. Today, the recordings of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan have made the qawwali known in the West. In Vasant Moon's time, the qawwali form was adapted to songs about Dr. Ambadkar.
- Radha and Krishna : Radha is the beloved of the god Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu. The pair symbolizes the love of man for the divine but also is depicted as a romantic couple.
- Raj : Rule or reign. Usually used for the British Raj, but here used for the time when Ambedkar's ideals would rule, i.e., Bhim Raj.
- Raja : A legend of royal truthfulness, much told in story and drama.
- Harischandra
- Rakshasa : Demons possessed of godly powers; a concept used to frighten children.
- Ram, Sita, Lakshman : The main characters of the beloved epic the *Ramayana*, in which Ram, the king and an avatar of Vishnu; his brother Lakshman and Ram's wife, Sita, endure exile, Sita's capture, and war, and return triumphantly to Ayodhya.
- Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh : The organization of nationalist volunteers, known as the RSS or simply the Sangh. founded in Nagpur in 1924 to train young men in nonsectarian, militant, conservative Hinduism. Still important as the ideological foundation of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. In Moon's day, the Sangh was inclusive and popular in Nagpur.

Reservations, Served seats	:	India's version of affirmative action. The Government of India Act of 1935 placed some four hundred castes on a list or Schedule, and Untouchables, after that know as Scheduled Castes were then qualified for reserved places in legislatures, educational institutions, and government jobs. Reservations are now extended to groups above the Scheduled Castes known as Other Backward Castes, and in Moon's narrative the Weavers demand such privileges.
Rupee	:	The basic Indian unit of currency.
Sadhu	:	A commonly used term for a mendicant or holy man.
Samadhi	:	A memorial for a holy man. Its use for the resting place of Hardas L. N.s' ashes indicates his exceptional standing in the Mahar, now Buddhist, community.
Samata Sainik Dal	:	The Army of Equality, a group made up primarily of youths and founded by Ambadkar for education and for protection of Depressed Class activities. Often called simply the Dal.
Sambhar	:	A gravy of lentils and spices, eaten with rice or other south Indian foods.
Sanchi	:	A complex of first-century B.C.E. stupas with ornamented gates that are classical Buddhist art. Very important as a pilgrimage place for Buddhists internationally
Sandal/shoe	:	Throwing a sandal or shoe at someone or garlanding a statue with shoes is the ultimate insult.
Sangh	:	See Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.
Sannyasi	:	A holy man who has taken vows of homelessness.
Satnami	:	A sect of Hinduism which brought together chiefly the Chamars of the Chattisgarh area of central India in a movement for religious purity and social progress.
Satyagraha	:	Literally, truth force or grasp. A nonviolent, direct-action, mass technique developed by Gandhi and then used by the Ambedkar movement for water rights, temple entry, and protest of the 1946 omission of separate electorates from the franchise plan just before Independence.
Satyashodak Samaj	:	The radical reform organization of Jotiba Phule in the nineteenth century that still in Moon's day had some organization and influence in Maharashtrian villages.

SCF	:	Scheduled castes Federation. Ambedkar's second political party, founded in 1942 when it was clear that the all-inclusive Independent Labour Party had little caste Hindu support. The 1942 SCF conference in Nagpur is famous for its inclusion of women and their concerns. The Scheduled Castes Federation lost badly in the 1946 elections.
Shiva	:	One of the most important gods of Hinduism.
Shramaner	:	A stage of ordination in Buddhism requiring vows less permanent than those of a bhikshu.
Shudra	:	The fourth varna, or caste cluster, of classical Hinduism. Supposedly composed of all who serve the higher castes. Aside from Brahmans, all the Marathi-speaking caste referred to in Moon's narrative would technically qualify as Shudras.
Subcaste	:	The large Mahar caste, like all large castes, contained endogamous units. Among the Nagpur Mahars, these were Ladvan, Bavane, Barke, Zhade-Bavane, and Somvanshi. Before the Ambedkar movement they were ranked hierarchically, formed the basis for social life, and served as smaller units of identity.
Supari	:	A mix of betel with various other substances to make a digestive to be chewed after a meal.
Sweeper	:	An English name used here for two groups of Untouchables who basically remove human waste: the Bhangis of north India and the Mehtars of Madhya Pradesh. No Untouchable caste in Maharashtra performed that duty, and so sweepers were imported.
Talkies	:	Generic term for movies or films. Still used today.
Tamasha	:	Maharashtrian folk theater. Money is thrown to popular actors during the performance.
Urdu	:	A language developed after Muslims from Afghanistan entered India in the thirteenth century. Its syntax is that of Hindi, but its vocabulary borrows from Persian, Turkish, and Arabic. Nagpur was in a Hindi-speaking state before States Reorganization. Most city dwellers speak Hindi as well as Marathi, and some speak Urdu, which is considered a very poetic language.
Ustad	:	Master. Here a wrestling trainer. In other contexts, a master musician.
Vaishakh	:	The month bridging April and May in the

		Hindu calendar.
Varkari	:	One who makes the pilgrimage to Pandharur, to the temple of Vitthal and Rukmini, singing the songs of the saint-poets.
Vidarbha	:	The northeastern section of the Marathi-speaking area, culturally separate from three other areas: the coastal strip below Mumbai known as the Konkan; the area around and south of Pune known as the Desh; and the area to the southeast that was under the Nizam of Hyderabad known as Marathwada. Each area has its own culture and mix of castes.
Vitthal and Rukmini	:	The dominant religious sect among the non-Brahmans of the Marathi-speaking area is the varkai (pilgrimage)sampradaya (tradition), centered on worship of the god Vitthal or Vithoba and his wife Rukmini. A pilgrimage to the chief Vithoba temple in Pandharpur is the central activity of varkaris, but the hymns of the many saint-poets of the sampradaya are sung all over Maharashtra in bhajan sessions. A Mahar, Chpkhamela, and his family are among the poet-saints of the sect. one school of thought finds the origin of Vitthal in Buddhism. Vithoba, like other gods and saints, is sometimes given a "mother" status, i.e., Vithai.

The Prisons We Broke

Aai	:	Mother
Aaja	:	Grandfather
Aaji	:	Grandmother
Abir	:	A fragrant powder made from various ingredients like sandalwood
Akhad	:	Dialect form of 'Ashadh', the fourth month of the Marathi calendar
Akka	:	Term used to address the elder sister
Akshata	:	Coloured rice grains which are showered on the bridal couple in the marriage ceremony
Amawasya	:	No-moon night
Ambil	:	Liquid preparation made with ragi and buttermilk
Ambura	:	Stale food gone sour
Angara	:	Holy ash
Anna	:	Old measure of money (the equivalents would be: 16 annas = 1 rupee; 2 annas = 1 ginni; 3 gandas = 1 damdi; 4 cowries = 1 ganda or pei; 4 damdis = 1 paisa; 6 paise = 1 anna)

Appasab	:	Term of respect used for a brother or man.
Arhar dal	:	A kind of lentil
Ashwin	:	Name of the seventh month in the marathi calendar
Atya, atyabai	:	Paternal aunt; often mother-in-law, because of the custom of marrying the girl to the paternal aunt's son
Baliraja	:	The king of the Shudras. The story goes that he was a very benevolent king, so the gods became scared of his merit. God Vishnu went to him in the form of a young Brahmin and taking advantage of his generosity asked for land that could be spanned in three steps. When Bali granted him his wish, Vishnu assumed a gigantic form and covered the earth and the sky in two steps. When Vishnu asked for place for the third step, Bali offered his head. Vishnu put his foot on Bali's head and pushed him deep down into the nether world.
Balutedars	:	The twelve major Shudra and Atishudra Dalit castes that were responsible for the village work and were entitled to some return.
Barbat	:	Cooked meat; meat curry
Bashinga	:	Crown of flowers placed on the heads of the bride and the groom
Bhagat	:	A non - brahmin priest; medicine-man; godman
Bhajani mandal	:	A group of amateur singers who often sing in the temple at nights. They would also go to people's houses and sing for different occasions.
Bhaji	:	Vegetable
Bhakri	:	Roti made from jowar flour
Bhandara	:	Holy turmeric
Bhanwas	:	A small clay platform
Bhau	:	Brother
Bohole	:	The platform on which the bride and groom sit during the time of marriage
Boka	:	Limb of an animal
Bombil	:	Dried bommelow fish
Bukka	:	Black powder used for worship
Chaitra	:	The first month of the Marathi calendar
Champak	:	A kind of flowering tree
Chang bhale	:	A ritual chant in the worship of god Khandoba and goddess Mari Aai
Chanya	:	Pieces of dried meat strings
Chaturvarya	:	The system of four 'Varnas', viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. This term excludes the Atishudras like the Mahars
Chawdi	:	A central place in the village for public

	:	and official transactions. The Mahars would have their own Mahar chawdi in their locality.
Choli	:	Traditional blouse
Chulat aaja	:	Granduncle
Chulha	:	Stove
Cowry	:	An old measure; see note on 'anna'
Dakshina	:	Money or things offered to the Brahmin priests as a mark of respect
Damdi	:	An old coin, very low in value; see note on 'anna'
Devhara	:	Platform on which idols of gods are kept
Devrushiin	:	Fortune - teller
Dhabbu	:	Literally means fatso. The word is used to refer to a round biggish coin worth one paisa in the old times.
Dhangar	:	Shepherd
Dhani	:	Master; low castes had to address the upper caste men as 'Dhani'
Dhondya	:	From 'dhonda', a name meaning stone
Dhoop sticks	:	Incense sticks
Dhoti	:	A garment worn by men to cover the lower half of the body
Dhupa arti	:	Ritual worship
Dimdi	:	A tiny drum carried by the vaghya
Dir	:	Brother-in-law, Husband's brother
Ganda	:	An old measure of money; see note on 'anna'
Ghat	:	River bank
Ghongadi	:	Coarse blankets of sheep wool
Ghugrya	:	A dish of unhusked jowar grains soaked in water, ground and rolled into small balls
Ghumki	:	A prolonged and deep ringing sound produced in the throat; also a small musical instrument or chord
Ginni	:	Old measure of money; see note on 'anna'
Gomutra	:	Cow's urine, considered to be holy by upper caste Hindus
Gudhi padva	:	The first day of Chaitra, the first month of the Marathi calendar, celebrated as new year's day
Gudhi	:	Flag
Gulal	:	Coloured powder
Gulawani	:	A syrupy dish made from jaggery, traditionally served in festive meals or marriage feasts
Hadal	:	A female ghost which is supposed to be quite terrifying
Haldi	:	Turmeric
Halgi	:	A kind of drum
Inibai	:	Kinship term, signifying relationship

Ithuba	:	between the mothers of the bride and groom The dialectal pronunciation of 'Vithoba' Or Viththal
Iwan	:	Kinship term, signifying relationship between the fathers of the bride and groom
Jalsa	:	A public performance of songs
Janeu	:	The sacred thread worn by Brahmins as a mark of their status as a high caste
Jatra	:	Carnival
Jogtin	:	A girl offered to goddess Bhawani/Ambabai as her ritual worshipper
Johar mai/bap	:	The traditional greeting or 'salaam' that the mahar supposed to offer to the higher caste people.
Jowar	:	Millet
Kaka	:	Paternal uncle, father's brother
Kaki	:	Paternal aunt; also a respectful way of addressing elder women
Kalawatin	:	A dancing woman from the Kolhati caste; also means woman artist. The word is also used as a term of insult, signifying a woman with loose morals.
Kameej	:	Long shirt
Kanher	:	A wild bush with pink-white flowers which are used for worship
Karavali	:	Bride or groom's sister or female cousin
Karbhari	:	Leader of the community
Kargota	:	String tied around the waist
Kartik	:	Eighth month of the Marathi calendar
Karuna	:	Compassion
Katwat	:	Wooden plate
Keli	:	Mud pitcher used to store drinking water
Khanderaya	:	God Khandoba of Jejuri
Khob	:	A groove
Khun	:	Traditional blouse piece with a big border
Kolhati	:	A nomadic caste lower in the caste hierarchy, famous for men who play musical instruments and women who dance. Women artists in the folk theatre often belong to this caste.
Kumkum	:	Red powder used to make a mark on the forehead
Kuncha	:	Small brush used to gather the flour spilt around the grinding stones
Kurwadya	:	Tapioca wafers
Laki	:	Meat soup
Lezim	:	A musical instrument in the form of a stout, short stick with a chain attached to it like a bow string. Thin round iron slices are woven in the chain, which make a musical

	:	sound when the stick is shaken. Used in folk dances and sports.
Lonar	:	A caste that traditionally sold lime or charcoal
Madanwayu	:	High fever which especially afflicted new mothers
Magh	:	Eleventh month of the Marthi calendar
Mahar	:	The name of an Atishudra caste
Maharwada	:	The residential colony of the Mahar community located outside the village
Mali	:	Gardener
Mama	:	Maternal uncle
Mami	:	Wife of maternal uncle
Mamledar	:	The government official responsible for the administration of the district and the collection of revenue
Mandal	:	Group or club
Mangwada	:	The residential colony of the Mang community
Maratha	:	A Kshatriya caste. Traditionally fighters, landholders, rulers
Mawshi	:	Maternal aunt
Mistry	:	An honorific term for a carpenter or contractor
Mridung	:	A kind of drum
Mudy	:	A woman whose nose has been chopped off
Mundawali	:	Ceremonial strings of flowers worn by the bride and groom on their heads. One string is tied around the forehead and the other two fall on each side of the face, framing it with flowers.
Murali	:	A girl offered to god Khandoba in marriage
Nachya	:	Male dancer who dressed as a female in the Tamasha theatre
Nag narsoba	:	Mud snakes which are worshipped on the Naga-panchami day
Nagapanchami	:	Snake festival
Namaj	:	Muslim paryer
Neeti	:	Ethical, upright behaviour; morality
Nivad	:	Sacrificial food offered to the gods
Padri	:	Christian priest
Padva	:	Marathi new year day
Paista	:	Old measure of money; see not on 'anna'
Pallav	:	The part of the sari which covers the torso
Panch	:	Committee composed of the elder men of the community which dispensed justice
Pancha	:	Towel
Panji	:	Meat soup
Parul	:	Clay pots
Patil	:	The administrative officer of the village, generally from the Maratha caste

Pativrata	:	A woman who upholds her husband as god and serves him faithfully
Pei	:	Old measure of money; see note on 'anna'
Pithale	:	Dish made of dal flour
Potraja	:	Ritual worshipper of the god Khandoba and goddesses like Ambabai, who played drums
Pradnya	:	Intellect
Puran poli	:	Sweet chapattis stuffed with jaggery and lentils
Rede jatra	:	Buffalo fair conducted during the festivities for the mother goddess
Rukhwat	:	Ritual gifts to the bride from her maternal house, kept on display
Saint Tukaram	:	The 17 th century Marathi saint poet who belonged to the Warkari sect
Sankashti Chaturthi	:	The fourth lunar day of every dark fortnight in a month on which devotees fast to avert difficulties and troubles. Sacred to God Ganapati
Sasra	:	Father-in-law
Sasu	:	Mother-in-law
Sat Asra	:	Seven spirits that are supposed to dwell in rivers and wells, and are worshipped as deities
Satwa	:	Truth
Sheel	:	Character
Satwai and Barma	:	A pair of deities who are believed to write the future of a child on its forehead on the fifth day after the child's birth. Barma is the dialectal form of Brahmadev, the brahminical god, from the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh worshipped by the high caste among Hindus.
Shalu	:	Heavily brocaded sari, generally worn by the bride at the time of marriage
Shenai	:	A musical instrument
Sher	:	An old measure (around 1 kilogram)
Shimpi	:	Tailor
Shravan	:	Fifth month in the Marathi calendar
Suti roti	:	Roti of wheat flour made without oil offered with the cooked liver, heart and lungs of the sacrificed animal
Suwasini	:	A married woman whose husband is alive
Tagari	:	Deep wooden plate
Tai/Taisaab	:	Term of respect generally meaning 'elder sister'
Tal	:	Cymbals
Tambul	:	Combination of betel leaf, areca nut, clove, lime, etc, eaten after meals
Tarwad	:	A wild tree bearing yellow flowers

Tatya	:	A term of respect used to address a man. Also a name.
Tawa	:	Baking plate made of iron
Teli	:	Oil merchant
Tonga	:	Horse carriage
Ukadala	:	Literally boiled food; here, decayed food that is boiled
Vaghya	:	Ritual worshipper of god Khandoba, offered to the god as a child
Vajra	:	The deadly weapon of God Vishnu which is invincible
Vinkar	:	Weaver
Walni	:	Here, a string for hanging things
Yeskar	:	The Mahar whose duty was to work for the village
Zad	:	Literally a tree; here, a person possessed by a spirit, god or goddess
Zalu songs	:	Zalu is a song sung on the fourth day of wedding festivities before the bride leaves for the groom's house. The women from her maternal household sit by the bride and her mother and sob as they sing the song. The men stay quietly in the background.

Karukku

Chadu-gudu	:	The same team-game as kabaddi, where members of a team hold their breath and run over to the opposite side, one by one, to try and capture members of the other team.
Davani	:	Half-sari
Jalli-kattu	:	A sport in which bulls are baited and chased.
Kanji	:	Thin gruel of rice or other grains; sometimes just the starchy water drained from cooked rice.
Kola-flour	:	Rice or soapstone powder, used for making kolam designs on the flour.
Kummi	:	Folk dance performed by women and girls, with rhythmic clapping.
Kuuthu	:	Folk theatre based on episodes from the epics or puranas.
Kuuzh	:	A thick porridge of millet or grain.
Machaan	:	Literally, brother-in-law; more generally a form of address between friends.
Marudai	:	Madurai in uneducated speech.
Nadar	:	A caste name; in Bama's village Nadars are toddy-tappers and shop keepers.
Naicker	:	A landowning caste, the dominant caste community in Bama's village.

Pandal	:	A partially enclosed space, erected outdoors.
Pannaiyal	:	Labourer.
Pey	:	A minor evil spirit or ghost.
Pissasu	:	Minor evil spirit or ghost.
Pullaanguzhal	:	flute
Sabai	:	Club or society; in <i>Karukku</i> , church groups and societies.
Sapparam	:	Small wooden chariot carried on the shoulders in which the icons are taken out in procession at festival times.
Silambam	:	A martial art or sport, in which staves are used as in fencing.
Villuppaattu	:	Folk performance in which a story is sung to the accompaniment of several musical instruments, particularly the bow-shaped vil.

The Scar

Ammayi	:	Maternal grandmother
Annan	:	Elder brother
Appam	:	Rice preparation, similar to Dosai, but thicker in the centre
Athai	:	Father's sister
Ayya	:	Sir
Chachi	:	Aunt (term generally used by Muslims influenced by Urdu)
Chakiliyar	:	An aboriginal agricultural community. Chakiliyar's work with leather, and are considered untouchables. They are also know by the term Arundathiyar
Cheri	:	A settlement outside the village where the Schedule castes live, something like a ghetto
Chettiars	:	A caste Hindu community, usually involved in trading
Chithappa	:	Father's younger brother
Cinamma	:	Mother's sister or father's second wife
Dosai	:	A kind of pancake made with fermented rice flour batter.
Gopuram	:	Temple tower
Idli	:	Steamed food made with rice flour
Jalra	:	Cymbals, used to keep time to music
Kabadi	:	A kind of team-game.
Kaili	:	A garment for men made with a piece of cloth sewn together in the ends. Usually

		made with bright-coloured doth with a floral or checkered pattern.
Kanji	:	Gruel
Karagattam	:	An acrobatic folk dance in which the dancer bears a flower-decked, water-filled pot on her head.
Karnam	:	A village officer who maintains the record of land revenue.
Kavadi	:	A folk dance form performed with a wooden semi-circular structure that is usually decorated with peacock feathers.
Kitti	:	The game of tip-cat
Koothu	:	Folk theatre
Konar	:	An agricultural caste Hindu community. Konars generally tend to goats and cows.
Kottumelam	:	A common name for percussion instruments.
Kudukudupaikaran	:	A soothsayer, who usually announces his presence and punctuates his predictions by playing a drum-like rattle.
Machan	:	Son of one's maternal uncle or paternal aunt; also, refers to wife's brother or sister's husband.
Machi	:	A relationship term
Mama	:	Mother's brother
Mami	:	Aunt (maternal uncle's wife)
Masi	:	Eleventh month of the Tamil calendar, mid-february to mid-March
Namaz	:	Prayer
Nayanam	:	A long wind instrument
Nayandi melam	:	An ensemble of musical instruments accompanying folk dances like karagattam and kavadi.
Othoodi kuzhal	:	A long wind instrument used as an accompaniment
Pambaram	:	Top
Panangkizhangu	:	A kind of root vegetable (tuberous roots like Cassava, yam, corm, celery-root, sweet potato)
Panniyaram	:	A snack made of rice flour and jaggery.
Parayar	:	An aboriginal agricultural community. Parayars were forced to do menial jobs like burning the dead, and are considered untouchables.
Pathneer	:	Palmyra sap collected in a pot lined with lime to prevent fermentation.
Periappa	:	Mother's elder sister's husband or father's elder brother
Poori masal	:	Food item made by frying wheat dough in oil, and served with a potato curry.
Sambar	:	A kind of gravy prepared by adding

		condiments, vegetables and tamarind paste to cooked lentils.
Sami	:	Expression of respect
Sundal	:	Boiled and spiced pulses, served as snacks.
Sunnath	:	Circumcision ceremony
Thali	:	The sacred thread tied around the neck of the bride during a marriage ceremony.
Thamaku	:	A kind of small drum used as a tom-tom
Thambi	:	Younger brother
Thapattai	:	A small drum, hung around the shoulders and played with a pair of small sticks.
Tharai	:	Long, brass trumpet-like instrument.
Thasildar	:	Revenue officer in charge of a small division
Thatha	:	Grandfather
Thavil	:	A drum played with the hand on one side, and a stick on the other.
Thevar	:	A martial caste Hindu community.
Thinnai	:	A small raised platform in the verandah of the house
Uthappam	:	A thicker variety of dosai to which vegetables are sometimes added.
Uppuma	:	A common south Indian dish made of semolina
Vattai	:	A saucer-like vessel
Vetti	:	White cloth used as a lower garment by men
Vellai	:	White

Appendix II

Interview with K.A. Gunasekaran

2 September 2011, Puducherry

1. *Why did you write the autobiography "The Scar"?*
There is no autobiography in Tamil by a Dalit. Uchalya (1998) [*The Branded*] is a Hindi autobiography that came in Tamil translation. So, I wrote my autobiography in Tamil.
2. *What do you mean by "scar"?*
Scars are the deep psychological wounds in life caused by the caste system. These life experiences can never be forgotten.
3. *What do you think about Dalit literature at present?*
Dalit Literature portrays the stories of inexpressible feelings meted out by the caste system. Upper caste people's literature has all genres. Similarly, Dalit literature should be self-sufficient in all genres.
4. *What do you think about the unhealthy food habits and lack of food of Dalits?*
Healthy foods are being advised by doctors. Food-grains, leaves, ghee, milk are unreachable to poor Dalits. It is the duty of the politician to make available healthy food for Dalits.
5. *How do you feel about the Islamic friends from Elayankudi at present?*
Recently, I have retired as the Director, IITS, Chennai (from 20-08-2008 to 19-08-2011). I got the same affection from Elayankudi's Islam Jamath. They said "Gunasekaran is our son." The friendship is still flourishing.
6. *What do you think about "Carrying-Death-News" by Dalits?*
Now, it is changing. Dalits' education and political progress are minimizing the practice of "Carrying-Death-News." However, it should not be practiced.
7. *What do you feel about the caste atrocities and humiliations at present?*
India is a caste based society. Here, caste pride is sustained in marriage, election, festivals, and other rituals. "Renewal" of caste pride is maintained. When Dalit politics reaches its zenith, caste hegemony will be broken into pieces.

8. *You were called "Elayankudi K.A. Gunasekaran" by AIR Trichy. Now, why don't you use the label as a writer?*
The AIR introduced me as a "singer." According to that, I lead the life of an artist.
9. *What you think about Dr.Ambedkar and his ideology?*
Along with Dr.Ambedkar's ideology, Periyar, Karl Marx, and Buddhism's ideologies should be used to liberate Dalits from ignorance.
10. *How do your writings and folk songs awaken the consciousness of Dalits?*
My writings and folk songs aim at liberating Dalits in all possible means. They are reaching all the people.

Appendix III

Interview with Siddalingaiah

8 February 2012, Bangalore

1. *What forced you to write Ooru Keri? Is it overflow of feelings?*
Of course, it is overflow of feeling. That is the reason I wrote it. I thought I have something to say to the society. And I had something to say to the society.
2. *How is Ooru Keri different from your other writings?*
Basically, I am a poet. My poetry is popular and sung by Dalits. Because *Ooru Keri* is prose, it became more popular than poetry. Wherever I go, they mention my past episodes in which I narrated my experiences and the tragic incidents. They [readers] remember my life stories. They happily read *Ooru Keri*.
3. *Could you say anything about your teacher Andalamma?*
She is a good teacher. She is a Brahmin. She supported all the needy students. She is sympathetic.
4. *What is your view about Gangamalagaiah?*
He taught me how to give public speech. He told stories of great orators. That attracted me. I was influenced by his teachings.
5. *What message do you wish to give to Dalit writers and researchers?*
I want that people should see how the society is based on inequality. So, they should fight and work to bring about equal society, a society which is classless and casteless.
6. *What is your idea about Dalit religions and their conversation?*
Actually, I am an atheist. I worked on village Gods for my Ph.D research. So, the myth and legend sometimes reveal the agonies and sufferings of Dalits. So, we could not ignore village deities, that too Dalit deities. We have our own religion, songs, and history. The thing is one should excavate or explore them. Those are forgotten. We should build them out for future.
7. *In your earlier stage, you won prizes and sold books. Now, as the President of Kannada Book Authority, what do*

you feel now?

More than four lakhs books were given freely to village needy students. I worked as labour in factories and waiter in marriage halls to buy books. I also worked as gardener. All these were done to buy books. And I sold cups and even good books for food whenever I starved. Now, I remember all these things. I know the value of books.

8. *As a student leader, you have visited most of the villages of Karnataka. Do you still visit the villages?*

I would like to go. Tomorrow, our Dalit comrades have organized an Inter-caste marriage in a village. It is about 250 kilometers from Bangalore. I have to participate in the programme and address the gathering to overcome caste oppressions. I would like to give them moral support.

9. *Do you face any caste discrimination as a government officer?*

No, I became a legislator for about twelve years (1988-1994.) So, I use that platform. I have been fighting against discriminations. I use that platform to redress the problems of Dalits. I was an Ambedkarist, and Marxist. Nobody dare to discriminate me.

10. *What is your view on Dalit Literature in Karnataka and India?*

Marathi Dalit literature is leading us. In fact, after Marathi, Kannada Dalit literature is flourishing. I want see the same momentum in all the states of India.

From

S. Bharathiraja
Roll. No: 0901070008
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To

The Controller of Examinations
Annamalai University
Annamalai Nagar

Through

The Dean
Faculty of Arts
Annamalai University

The Professor and Head
Department of English
Annamalai University

The Research Advisor
Department of English
Annamalai University

Respected Sir,

Sub.: Ph.D. Dissertation Submission – Reg.

I wish to state that I joined Ph.D. (Full-time) in the Department of English, Annamalai University on 08-03-2010 under the Research Advisorship of Dr. T. Deivasigamani, Assistant Professor of English, AU. I worked on the title, “A Study of Social Realism in the Select Indian Dalit Autobiographies,” and I submitted its synopsis on 21-12-2011. My academic year ends on 07-03-2012. In this connection, I submit five copies of dissertations (submission fees remittance C.No. 174045, dated 27-02-2012 for Rs. 12,000/-) along with five copies of published Research Papers for your perusal.

Thanking you

Place: Annamalai Nagar
Date: 28-02-2012

Enclosed:

1. No-Due certificates
2. Ph.D. Joining Report
3. Copies of published Research Papers (5 copies)
4. Dissertations (5 copies)
5. Submission fees remittance & Copies of Tuition Fees

S. Bharathiraja
Professor & Head
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T. Deivasigamani
(Research Supervisor)

Yours faithfully,

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